

AFRICANUS JOURNAL

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THE AFRICANUS GUILD



L to R: Quonekuia Day, Mark Chuanhang Shan, Jennifer Creamer

“If not for the Africanus Guild, I would not even think of getting a Ph.D. and would not have had the chance to teach my own course at Gordon-Conwell, and be trained to be a Bible teacher, and for this I am most grateful.” –Benjamin Fung

Quonekuia Day received her Ph.D. from North-West University in 2021.
Mark Shan received his Ph.D. from North-West University in 2025.
Jennifer Creamer received her Ph.D. from North-West University in 2016.

The Africanus Guild is a support program set up to assist selective, underrepresented constituencies to pursue research Ph.D.s from North-West University. The Guild is especially oriented to the multicultural, multiracial urban scene. Accepted students are mentored by a Gordon-Conwell faculty member. Candidates may complete the Th.M. at the Boston campus and then apply to the Guild.

Goals of the *Africanus Journal*

The *Africanus Journal* is an award-winning interdisciplinary biblical, theological, and practical journal of the Campus for Urban Ministerial Education (CUME). Its goals are to promote:

- a. the mission and work of the members and mentors of the Africanus Guild Ph.D. Research Program of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston;
- b. the principles of the Africanus Guild (evangelical orthodox Christian men and women who are multicultural, multiracial, urban-oriented, studying a Bible without error in a cooperative way);
- c. Christian scholarship that reflects an evangelical perspective, as an affiliate of GCTS-Boston. This is an interdisciplinary journal that publishes high quality articles in areas such as biblical studies, theology, church history, religious research, case studies, and studies related to practical issues in urban ministry. Special issues are organized according to themes or topics that take seriously the contextual nature of ministry situated in the cultural, political, social, economic, and spiritual realities in the urban context.

Scholarly papers may be submitted normally by those who have or are in (or are reviewed by a professor in) a Th.M., D.Min., Ed.D., Th.D., ST.D., Ph.D., or equivalent degree program.

Two issues normally are published per year.

<https://www.gordonconwell.edu/cume/africanus-journal>

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Life of Julius Africanus

Julius Africanus was probably born in Jerusalem, many scholars think around AD 200. Africanus was considered by the ancients as a man of consummate learning and sharpest judgment (*Ante-Nicene Fathers* 6:128). He was a pupil of Heracles, distinguished for philosophy and other Greek learning, in Alexandria, Egypt around AD 231–233. In AD 220/226, he performed some duty in behalf of Nicopolis (formerly Emmaus) in Palestine. Later he likely became bishop of Emmaus (Eusebius, *History*, VI.xxxi.2). Origen calls him “a beloved brother in God the Father, through Jesus Christ, His holy Child” (*Letter from Origen to Africanus* 1). Fellow historian Eusebius distinguishes him as “no ordinary historian” (*History*, I. vi.2). Eusebius describes the five books of *Chronologies* as a “monument of labor and accuracy” and cites extensively from his harmony of the evangelists’ genealogies (*History*, VI. xxxi. 1–3). Africanus was a careful historian who sought to defend the truth of the Bible. He is an ancient example of meticulous, detailed scholarship which is historical, biblical, truthful, and devout.

Even though Eusebius describes Africanus as the author of the *Kestoi*, Jerome makes no mention of this (*ANF* 6:124). The author of *Kestoi* is surnamed Sextus, probably a Libyan philosopher who arranged a library in the Pantheon at Rome for the Emperor. The *Kestoi* was probably written toward the end of the 200s. It was not written by a Christian since it contains magical incantations (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri* III.412).

The Greek text of Africanus’ writings may be found in Martinus Josephus Routh, *Reliquiae sacrae* II (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1974 [1846]), 225–309, and Martin Wallraff, Umberto Roberto, Karl Pinggéra, eds., William Adler, trans., *Iulius Africanus Chronographiae: The Extant Fragments, Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* 15 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

The extant writings of Julius Africanus may be found in vol. 1, no 1, April 2009 edition of the *Africanus Journal*.

Other Front Matter

Editorial Team for the issue: Lark Kelsey, Emmanuel Gyamera Yamoah, J. Saemi Kim, Seong Park, Nicole Rim, John Runyon, Aída Besançon Spencer, William David Spencer

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Summary of Content:

This year celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the Center for Urban Ministerial Education in Boston. This issue includes an article on the history of CUME by the late Dr. Ira Frazier and the history of the first female full-time professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and a number of theological articles and book reviews.

Reflections on CUME and Mentored Ministry: A Journey of Faith, Education, and Community

IRA V. FRAZIER

In the late 1950s, I first became aware of Boston through the song “*Charlie on the MTA*,” which I learned at summer camp. The song tells the story of Charlie; a man trapped on a Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) train because he couldn’t afford the increased fare. Unable to exit, he became a perpetual commuter. This song serves as a metaphor for the unexpected challenges of life—how simple barriers can have profound consequences and how people must find ways to navigate these obstacles. In many ways, Charlie’s plight parallels the struggles faced by those seeking theological education, where financial burdens, time constraints, and institutional barriers often make the journey seem insurmountable.

Church clergy in less affluent communities are hired with the expectation that the pastor will be bi-vocational. Implications are obvious. Pastoring a church requires a particular professional/theological training. The cost of being theologically trained is a challenging expense for many, especially when the congregation can’t contribute towards that training. Time constraints also present a challenge when one is bi-vocational. The pace of taking classes is limited to taking a few classes a semester, making a student take as many as ten plus years to graduate. Then there is the fact that theological training is not always geared to be relevant for communities that do not represent the mainstream. The pastors wonder if it is worth the sacrifice to become theologically educated or if experience would be a better educator.

In response to such challenges, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary’s Campus for Urban Ministerial Training (CUME) emerged as a transformative initiative. At the time, institutions such as CUTS in Philadelphia and SCUOP in Chicago were already paving the way for urban theological education by offering seminary-level courses tailored to church members and clergy. Spearheaded by Dr. Eldin Villafañe, CUME followed this model. However, CUME carved out its unique identity by focusing on accessibility, affordability, and cultural relevance. It offered certificate courses in Biblical Studies, Christian Thought, and Ministry. These programs were designed to meet the needs of pastors and church leaders who lacked formal theological training but carried immense practical experience from their ministry work.

Financial accessibility was a foundational principle of CUME’s model. Tuition was kept affordable, and financial aid was available for those in need. Students could also take classes in their own churches, provided the hosting sites were near public transportation, had sufficient parking, and were situated in safe neighborhoods. This decentralized model ensured that education wasn’t confined to traditional academic spaces but instead became embedded within local communities.

Another way that CUME was non-traditional had to do with meeting the pastors where they were in their experience and educational journey. The typical CUME student was well experienced in a local church setting but needed a broader understanding of Scripture that would come from learning how to do a deep exegetical study. To entice students to move in this direction, faculty needed to work with the curriculum to develop a plan to make the nontraditional students of CUME successful. The median age of CUME students was 40. If the pastor did not have an undergraduate degree and was 35 years of age and had five years of serving in the ministry of a church, the pastor could be accepted as a Candidate with Christian Experience. This provision was in line with the requirements of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS).¹ These different

1 The Association of Theological Schools serves as the primary accrediting body for graduate-level theological institutions offering degrees such as the Master of Divinity (M.Div.), Master of Arts (M.A.), Master of Theological Studies

elements would serve as a BA equivalent. CUME had to find a way to prepare each student to succeed at the master's level, a way for their students to complete a CUME Diploma Program. While working toward the diploma, the student would develop a discipline of study, learn to do research and writing, practice reading a theological thesis, and explore how to think theologically so as to respond in a coherent way. After successfully completing the diploma, the student would be ready to apply and be accepted as a full-time student. At the time, this strategy was revolutionary, but today it has become an accepted pathway in the Association of Theological Schools to achieve masters-level theological education. Accepting the experience of a student is what is more commonly known now as competency-based education.

One of the most defining characteristics of CUME has been its multicultural environment. Walking through the halls of CUME, one would often hear a symphony of languages spoken alongside English. The diversity of both students and faculty fostered an atmosphere of inclusivity, where individuals from different cultural backgrounds could learn, share, and grow together. It wasn't just about theological education—it was about cultural exchange, mutual understanding, and building a shared vision of ministry.

CUME's sense of community extended beyond the classroom. A beloved tradition was the universal coffee break, held every evening at precisely 8:25 PM. For fifteen minutes, students and faculty would step away from their lessons, share stories, discuss their ministries, and offer support to one another. These brief yet meaningful moments became an essential part of the CUME experience, fostering a spirit of camaraderie and reminding everyone that theological education was not just an academic pursuit but a deeply relational journey.

To complete all the requirements of the theological curriculum, CUME needed to create a program that would integrate all the elements learned so that these would be synthesized into the ministry experience and growth of the pastor. The program would help seasoned pastors reflect on their experiences alongside the new learning they were receiving and would help them to apply both factors toward the growth of their congregations and the efficacy of their ministries in their particular contexts. Only one model of an attempt at doing this existed. It was the supervised ministry program at the Seminario Evangélico in Puerto Rico. Our model incorporated these elements that were needed for our student population, but it had to be contextualized. It fell to me to create this part of the curriculum.²

At the heart of CUME's educational philosophy was the Mentored Ministry Program—a revolutionary approach to ministerial formation. Traditionally, field education programs required students to leave their home churches and serve in unfamiliar congregations under an experienced supervising pastor. This arrangement aimed to help students learn the practical aspects of being a pastor or church leader pairing inexperienced students with seasoned pastors, fostering growth and skill development. However, it was often viewed as a process of molding students into replicas of their mentors rather than encouraging individuality. However, CUME reimaged this model by focusing on mentorship rather than supervision. Instead of a hierarchical relationship, the mentorship model emphasized partnership, dialogue, and mutual learning among peers and seasoned mentor pastors and mentees or partners in the ministry.

(M.T.S.), and Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.).

2 The full program, its philosophy and practice can be found in Ira V. Frazier *Using Afrocentrism and Mentoring for the Ministerial Formation of African American Seminarians*, Dissertation, Andover Newton Theological School, Newton, MA, 1995. The Mentored Ministry Program was informed by Afrocentricity. Afrocentricity is a theoretical framework and cultural ideology that centers the experiences, history, and perspectives of people of African descent as the primary lens for understanding their identity, culture, and social reality. Coined and developed by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante in the late 20th century, Afrocentricity seeks to reposition African people as active agents in their own narratives, rather than passive subjects viewed through Eurocentric or other external paradigms. Afrocentricity is not merely a theory but a transformative worldview that seeks to create a more just and inclusive representation of African identity in all aspects of life.

Thus, Mentored Ministry emphasized a student-directed approach, demanding active student participation. A critical aspect of this program was the careful matching of student and mentor profiles. Both profiles outlined students' needs and mentors' gifts, ensuring a strong foundation for effective mentorship. Additional considerations, such as age, gender, cultural background, location, and availability, were factored into the matching process. This preparation often began a semester before the student officially enrolled in the course. Students met two hours a week with their mentor and one hour a week with their theological reflection group. This was an ideal environment for development in theological education. Mentoring meetings became spaces of reflection, support, and growth, where both mentors and students could share experiences, ask hard questions, and celebrate milestones. These gatherings were not just administrative check-ins—they were sacred spaces where the love of God was made visible in relationships, conversations, and shared wisdom. The success of the Mentored Ministry Program was not accidental. It was the result of intentional design, dedicated mentors, and students who brought passion and commitment to their learning.

A significant strength of the Mentored Ministry Program was its adaptability. While some were seasoned church leaders seeking formal theological training, others were newer to ministry but carried a deep sense of calling. The program honored these differences and provided pathways for students to succeed, whether through traditional degree programs or alternative entry points like the CUME Diploma Program. At this stage in their academic journey, students were typically highly focused and ready to immerse themselves in full-time ministry. They combined their readiness with excitement and anticipation as they prepared to fulfill their ministry callings.

Today's students became tomorrow's mentors. Through the Mentored Ministry program, students gained self-awareness, celebrated victories, and articulated their needs with clarity. The certifying board ensured that graduates possessed a set of competencies for leading churches and performing essential ministerial tasks.

Clergy members often carry the weight of societal expectations. They are seen as spiritual leaders and community role models. A mentoring relationship helped students understand these dynamics and equipped them to serve their communities effectively. Mentors demonstrated how to foster acceptance, kindness, and active participation within a community.

Mentors acted as role models, showcasing effective ways to lead churches and engage with communities. They provided valuable feedback and guided students in developing the skills needed for ministry. The relationship between mentor and student was built on trust, mutual respect, and open dialogue.

A Learning Covenant was created by the mentor and participant. The Learning Covenant served as a roadmap, helping students set measurable and achievable goals. Regular conversations between students and mentors ensured that these goals remained clear and attainable. Additionally, theological reflection groups and lecture series supported the mentoring relationship, creating a balanced framework for student growth.

Mentoring is both an art and a science. It involves crafting experiences that help students translate theory into practice. Students observe, practice, and refine their skills under their mentors' guidance. Feedback becomes a cornerstone of their development, helping them achieve mastery in their ministerial tasks.

The Mentor Ministry program at CUME encouraged students to integrate theological insights with practical application. By engaging in dialogue, theological reflection, and action-based learning, students gained a holistic understanding of ministry.³ The theological reflection groups, which met regularly, provided spaces for students to discuss their ministry experiences, wrestle with theological questions, and receive feedback from their peers and mentors. They were places of

3 The author's personal journey through the Doctor of Ministry degree program highlights the transformative power of the Mentored Ministry program. The dissertation focused on the DNA of CUME's mentoring approach, emphasizing self-awareness, servant leadership, and community impact.

vulnerability and trust, where students could process their successes, failures, and uncertainties in a supportive environment.

Another key factor in the success of the Mentored Ministry Program was its emphasis on self-awareness and personal growth. Students were encouraged to reflect deeply on their callings, their strengths, and their areas for improvement. They were asked questions like, “*Where do I see God moving? What do I hear God saying? How do I respond to the leading of God?*” These reflective practices became cornerstones of their formation, helping students not only grow in knowledge but also in spiritual maturity and self-understanding.

The Mentored Ministry program has reached beyond the walls of CUME, with partnerships formed with military chaplains and community organizations. The shared vision of ministry continues to inspire generations of students and mentors.

As CUME grew, so did its impact on students, churches, and communities. Many graduates of the Mentored Ministry Program went on to become mentors themselves, creating a cycle of learning, teaching, and discipleship that continues to this day. This self-seeding model ensured that the program’s impact would extend far beyond individual students, shaping entire communities and ministries. In the ensuing years, the different programs at Gordon-Conwell Seminary patterned their supervised ministry program in some way after the Mentored Ministry Program at CUME. Today the competency-based programs at seminaries continue to make use of mentoring as an essential element for ensuring the growth of their students in different areas: academic, personal growth, spiritual growth, ministry skills.⁴ These institutions and programs represent a significant shift in theological education, student-centered learning, contextual ministry experience, and emphasizing practical application. Most often they have a set of mentors to guide the students in acquiring academic and practical pastoral knowledge and skills. They align with ATS guidelines, ensuring rigorous academic and ministry preparation standards while accommodating non-traditional learners and diverse ministry contexts.

Throughout the years of CUME’s development, the mission of CUME remained clear: to equip church leaders with the tools, knowledge, and spiritual grounding they need to serve effectively in their local contexts. Whether through degree programs, certificate courses, or mentorship initiatives, CUME provided a holistic educational experience that integrated academic rigor, practical skills, and spiritual formation.

Reflecting on my own experiences with CUME, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have served as Director of Mentored Ministry and Assistant Director of Church Relations. These roles allowed me to witness firsthand the transformative power of theological education when it is contextualized, accessible, and deeply relational. I have seen students grow in confidence, skill, and spiritual maturity. I have watched mentors pour their wisdom into the next generation of leaders. And I have been reminded, time and time again, of the profound privilege it is to serve in God’s work of equipping and empowering His people.

The summer of 2000 was my last time teaching at CUME since my Multiple Sclerosis (MS) diagnosis and the progress of the disease would not allow for more. It was a time to rejoice in the good moments, remember the wonderful people, and reflect on how this community had profoundly shaped my theology. I had the privilege of meeting countless individuals who demonstrated kindness, faith, and dedication in serving the Lord. These same individuals played a vital role in supporting me as I completed my Doctor of Ministry dissertation which centered on the Mentored Ministry Program as I developed it. My health journey during the same period became a shared experience with the community at CUME.

4 One such example is Sioux Falls Seminary which offers the Kairos Project, one of the leading ATS-accredited competency-based programs. The Kairos Project is tailored to individual students’ ministry contexts and focuses on integrating learning directly into practical ministry.

I am deeply grateful to the community of believers at CUME, who not only modeled their faith but also showcased how a school's identity can profoundly shape lives and communities. CUME is a school that is both an educational institution and a vibrant community of faithful, faith-filled people who are formed through the relationships that take place in the classroom and the mentored ministry context that brings together in intentional ways the church, the minister, and the ministry student. This is the genius of the Villafañe vision, a curriculum whose center is the relational dimensions. This I would claim is the incarnational principle of urban ministry. Through it, I have discovered that dedicated and committed individuals serve both the church and their communities with unwavering passion.

CUME has been an immensely fulfilling place of ministry for me. Together, we have fellowshiped, celebrated lives well-lived, reflected on our shared experiences, and watched our children grow into the next generation of believers. Now, we witness a new generation of CUME children, and we affirm God's continued goodness in their lives.

It's remarkable how the vision of one person, Dr. Eldin Villafañe, branched out into a thread that now binds together a community committed to "*Seek the peace of the city.*" I am humbled to have been invited to participate in this vision by developing the Mentor Ministry program. The Mentor Ministry program proved to be highly successful. Its effectiveness caught the attention of other programs, some of which sought to replicate its model. Over time, the program became an integral part of CUME, serving as a foundational tool for affirming students' calls to ministry and service in their local churches.

The vision of CUME continues to grow, reaching beyond the classroom and impacting the city. Many have participated in CUME's activities over the years. The vision behind CUME has stood the test of time, continuing to demonstrate God's plan for successive generations of ministers, faculty, staff, students, and anyone curious about the transformative work taking place in the city.

Thank you, Lord, for the fruitful years of full-time service at CUME. I am also deeply grateful for the students who served as physical assistants, helping me navigate daily tasks with care and patience. Thank you, CUME, for being a place where faith, mentorship, and community converge to create something truly transformative. The journey continues, and the call remains clear: to serve, to teach, and to build God's kingdom with love, humility, and faith.

I began this writing project reflecting on "*Charlie on the MTA,*" but I conclude with the hymn "*Victory in Jesus,*" particularly verse two:

I heard about His healing, of His cleansing power revealing
How He made the lame to walk again and caused the blind to see
And then I cried, "Dear Jesus, come and heal my broken spirit"
And somehow Jesus came and brought to me the victory.

Dr. Ira V. Frazier is Former Assistant for Church Relations and Mentored Ministry and Director of Mentored Ministry. He has an MDIV from Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary and a DMIN from Andover Newton Theological School. He has published several articles for the International Mentoring Association.

“A Great and Productive Door Has Been Opened to Me” (1 Corinthians 16:9): Reminiscences from Gordon-Conwell’s First Full-Time Female Professor

AÍDA BESANÇON SPENCER

Presented October 23, 2025, to the Women’s Council of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA

Thank you for the honor of being able to address you today. Earlier at the beginning of my calling to teach at Gordon-Conwell, I spoke to the women’s council on the importance of images. Thank you Rev. Kwon for inviting me.

I have been at Gordon-Conwell since 1982 (same year as the zip code for Hamilton). I came here because the seminary was looking for a female New Testament professor. When Dr. David Scholer left to teach elsewhere, he insisted that a female professor be hired to replace him in New Testament. In addition, the Methodist Church was threatening to pull their approval of Gordon-Conwell for their ministerial candidates. Together, they kicked open a door for me to enter.

Both Gordon and Conwell had been supportive of women in church leadership from the beginning. In Gordon’s early days, the professors included both women and men. At one point, so many women attended that for a while they thought of it as a “ladies’ school entirely.”¹

A.J. Gordon himself wrote a definitive article supporting “the ministry of women,” which used to be given to all new students at Gordon-Conwell and we reproduced it in the *Africanus Journal* April 2016 (issue 8:1): 50-61, available online—a journal me and my husband the Rev. Dr. Bill Spencer started seventeen years ago from the Boston campus to promote all of Gordon-Conwell. However, when Gordon and Conwell came together in 1969, no one hired any full-time female professor. They did have able African American professors, Dr. Wes Roberts and Professor Sam Hogan. For thirteen years only female adjunct lecturers were hired, such as Roman Catholic Dr. Carolyn Osiek in New Testament and famous missionary Elizabeth Elliot for preaching.

Why did I come? I had just finished getting my doctorate at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, KY and heard from a neighbor of a position at Gordon-Conwell in mentored ministry. When I arrived in Massachusetts for an interview, I discovered that a New Testament position was also available, having been open for two years already. I was interested! That was my area of doctoral study and my main love in academics, to delve into the riches of the New Testament!

At that time there were not many positions open to me as an evangelical New Testament professor. Many evangelical schools, like Trinity, were not ready to hire a female to teach the Bible, especially the New Testament. Liberal schools did not want a professor who treated the Bible as fully reliable and historically accurate. In contrast, Gordon-Conwell had a commitment to female church leaders and to the city and concern for people’s spiritual *and* social wellbeing, which attracted me since I had worked as a community organizer.

This was a mutually beneficial arrangement. God was behind it because I did not even know Gordon-Conwell had a New Testament opening. Similar to the Apostle Paul, a door had been opened to me by the Lord. For me it was a great door and it was active or productive. Paul uses the metaphor of a “door” several times in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 16:9 he writes from Ephesus to the church in Corinth. He wants to visit the Corinthians again, but he decides to remain in Ephesus for a while longer. What was he doing in Ephesus? He began by speaking the good news about Jesus the Messiah at a synagogue. After three months, some spoke up publicly against his

1 A.B. Spencer, “Your Daughters Shall Prophecy: How Institutionalization Affected Women at Gordon,” *Africanus Journal* 8:1 (April 2016), 74-77.

message and he had to leave (Acts 19:8-9). Paul left with some disciples and found a lecture hall where he taught openly for two years (Acts 19:10). As a result, everyone in Asia heard God's word.

Was he alone? No, Prisca and Aquila had come with him to Ephesus from Corinth (Acts 18:18) and now they pastored their own church, while he preached to the larger community (1 Cor 16:19). Silas and Timothy joined the team in Corinth (Acts 18:5). The donation they brought from the church in Macedonia freed Paul to preach full time. They remained in Corinth.

Paul uses the same imagery of a door about a year later in Macedonia in 2 Corinthians 2:12. He describes having arrived in Troas trying to find out what happened to his coworker Titus. The Lord opened up an opportunity for him to preach the good news there, but Paul's spirit couldn't rest because he didn't find his Christian brother. So, he left Troas and went on his way to Macedonia, looking for him.

A third time Paul used this imagery. When in Rome, he asked the Colossians to pray that God would open a door for him and Timothy to speak the word, even though he was under house arrest (Col. 4:3).

Some of us use the idea of an "open door" as a way to choose God's will, an open door is usually a door easy to open, where there are no difficulties. But you may remember that 1 Corinthians 16:9 ends "and many being in opposition" or "I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a great and activated or productive door has been opened to me, and many are in the process of being in opposition" (1 Cor 16:8-9). Paul referred to the double or folding doors or gate outside a dwelling.² Thus, the door we enter opens up to a large villa for service with many inside the home.

When I came to Gordon-Conwell, the administration was fully supportive of me. Dr. Harold Lindsell, who wrote *Battle for the Bible* and was the chair of the board of trustees, insisted I get paid the same as the male professors, not less as was common then. But a few professors and some students did not agree that a woman should teach the Bible, forgetting that Prisca and Aquila taught "more accurately" God's truth to the learned Apollos.

Sometimes false gossip was spread among the students affecting my enrollment, making it difficult for me to meet the minimum student enrollment requirements in my classes a few times. It was said my teaching was too popular and also too technical! My promotion was twice delayed. On the other hand, when I preached at my installation, the applause was loud and sustained. Many people were glad that I had come, as a representative model for other women, including Latin American women.

I was not reared in a fundamentalist church. I was born and reared in the Dominican Republic, where I attended the only protestant church at that time. Thus, I did not expect some of the opposition I received through the years at different churches and conferences. For example, when I spoke at a conference in Columbia a few years back, slowly some men left the room where I was speaking and stood outside the windows in the courtyard. I was baffled but I figured they all needed some fresh air after all the talks they heard. Later my husband found out that their pastor had insisted they not be present when the woman minister preached. But, by standing outside the open windows, they could fulfill the letter of his law but still lean in and hear me. When I finished, they all came back inside the room.

I entered the door of Bible education as an innocent, but I stayed teaching because I was called to teach women and men how to study the New Testament and also what the New Testament taught.

Often I felt alone, at other times I felt that some wanted a female colleague who thought like a man. As Professor Higgins sang in *My Fair Lady*: "Why can't a woman be more like a man?" For instance, why should researching what the *guild* says about the Bible *precede* reading the Bible itself in its own literary and historical context? That makes no sense to me. The Bible takes priority.

2 *Thura*; also in James 5:9; Rev 3:8, 20; 4:1.

Also, for many years, my suggestions in groups were not recognized in the group, as one scholar exclaimed, “this idea came right out of the air.” My female neighbor, as a chief dispatcher in our town, when working with male police officers, had the same experience. The men had no category in their head to recognize a key suggestion could come from a woman.

My greatest encouragement was my husband Bill, who got a doctorate here in Boston in theology and became one of the foundational professors at the Boston campus and for decades the only theology professor at Boston. And after many years, he finally received the full financial recompense that he deserved, and the title of Distinguished adjunct professor. Once at an opening convocation the dean did not show up so the student leaders and the assistant dean turned to Bill to beg for a sermon in five minutes while they sang the opening hymn. And, after prayer, he did a great one, on finding and applying your spiritual gift.

One administrator in Hamilton thought that Bill was a traitor to the macho guild because he encouraged his wife to fulfill her call, get a doctorate, and accept this position before Bill did any of these things. Afterwards, Bill did them all. It hurt his feelings but he ignored it and kept going because he has always acted on what he believes is right. He is committed, as I am, to assist the Lord as he empowers 100 percent of the church, women as well as men, to use their gifts and fulfill their callings.

Not every open door should be entered. As I mentioned, Paul did not use the opportunity to preach the good news in Troas because of his concern for his coworker Titus. Paul had sent Titus with a delicate message to the Corinthians and had not heard back from him. He was concerned about him and the reception of his letter by the Corinthians. Relationships precede in importance new opportunities to preach or teach.

As a full-time professor, I still placed relationships over ambition. I did all my work but I tried not to overwork. Instead of preparing my lectures in my seminary office, I prepared them at home, Monday and Wednesday mornings, so I could be with my young son and my husband. When new meetings were organized, I usually made the first suggestion for times so that I could keep my tight schedule, teaching Tuesdays and Thursdays and attending meetings Wednesday afternoons. The male professors never complained and were graciously flexible. I never knew whether they figured out what I was doing.

What suggestions may I make for you? Three.

1.) The women’s council has been generous raising student **scholarships**. Thank you for persisting. I could never have attended Gordon-Conwell in Philadelphia if I had not received a scholarship. I had been making poverty level salary as a community organizer among Hispanics in Plainfield, New Jersey, under President Lyndon Johnson’s Community-action program. Ironically, I used many of the organizational skills I was taught as the first female full-time professor at Gordon-Conwell. My future husband, Bill, had started seminary and had been telling me about all that he was learning and I thought that learning about Jesus sure sounds like fun and worthwhile but I had no money to attend! He responded, that he would get me a scholarship from the president himself, who was Dr. Stuart Barton Babbage. So, one Saturday we drove down to Philadelphia from New Jersey, about a three hour ride. You may know that Philadelphia has many townhouses joined next to each other. Dr. Babbage lived on one of those streets. After wandering around a little bit, Bill found the street that he thought he had visited once for a student affair at the president’s home. We walked up and down the street and finally stood before two houses next to each other, neither labeled. Bill did not know which one was the right one. Even though I had never been there before, I said, “It is the one on the right side.” We had no map, no GPS, no paper with an address noted, and no appointment. I am shocked now I even went, although then it all seemed so natural and the right thing to do. So we knocked on the door, wondering what would happen. And, then, there he was, Dr. Babbage, looking startled with an overcoat half off. It turns out he was on a trip and had

run into his house for an hour from Australia and then he was going on his way. His whole family was in overcoats just to pick up the mail. He was so shocked that he gave me the scholarship on the spot! I enrolled that very spring.

When the Philadelphia campus was closed, I did not transfer to Massachusetts because of all the ministries in New Jersey in which we were involved and the Presbytery urged Bill and I to transfer to the local Presbyterian seminary, Princeton. But, ironically, the Lord brought me back to Gordon-Conwell, Massachusetts twelve years later.

What doors are being opened to you from the Lord as an organization and as individuals? If God is with you, enter these new fields, even if you might have to persist in entering and remaining. It looks like already you are pioneering many new ventures. I believe in what the Council does and when I worked as a full-time faculty member I donated regularly.

2.) Enter the doors **with others** when possible. Do ministry in community. When I first began I wanted Gordon-Conwell to hire another female professor so I would not be so alone at campus and at faculty meetings. Also, one woman cannot fulfill all the needs that different female students have. The earliest retreats were strange because it was all men and just me—but no long lines in the ladies' room! Then the administration invited the faculty wives to come as well. That was better. I remember one time when the president was introducing the faculty to the board of trustees. He said: "here is Dr so and so and his lovely wife___, one after another, as we sat in one large circle, until I wondered what is going to happen when he gets to us? And he did fumble, saying: Aida and her um..um..um...husband Bill. Bill just grinned. Paul worked with a team and so should we.

Dr. Garth Rosell was dean when I first arrived. His response was to mentor an able female student and eventually the school hired her ten years later, Dr. Gwenfair Adams! And now almost half of the full-time faculty at Gordon-Conwell are women, several in Biblical Studies.

Only recently did I discover that I may have been the first Protestant female Hispanic teaching full time in an ATS accredited school. Several Hispanic women had been teaching as adjuncts, but they did not yet have their doctorates. That got me curious and I checked the statistics for the Presbyterian Church. I was ordained in 1973. The Presbyterian Church had thought the first Latina Americana was ordained in 1975! I was ordained 2 years earlier! As I mentioned, I was born in the Dominican Republic, my mother from Puerto Rico, and my father from the Netherlands, but I married an Anglo, Mr. Spencer. So, my Hispanic heritage is not easy to discover! So, my open door stayed open for other evangelical women and it was opened to others I had not expected, my Spanish sisters!

3.) **Keep attuned to God's will** for yourself. Paul listened to his spirit in Troas. Our "spirit" is that part of us that communicates with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit indwells us and communicates back to our human spirit.

Not every opportunity may be *your* opportunity. The church has many gifted people and sometimes a good referral is best. But if it is your call, step up and act. Do not always say "no."

When I heard that Christians for Biblical Equality was having a conference focusing on Romans 16 September 2025, I felt that Bill and I could add to that conference by speaking on Prisca and Aquila. How many biblically trained Spanish-speaking clergy couples and professors are there? Thus, we raised the money to go to Buenos Aires (from our pension savings) and recently returned from there. Bill and I gave our bilingual talk, I spoke in Spanish, while Bill translated into English. Then, in the workshop, Bill spoke in English and I translated into Spanish. We felt that we did our best. The conference attenders gave us applause when we first finished our presentation, then after we answered their questions and then another one at the very end. Women in leadership in the countryside and in the city were all being discouraged by a group from the United States that suddenly and recently arrived and told them they shouldn't be leading in the church. A little late for

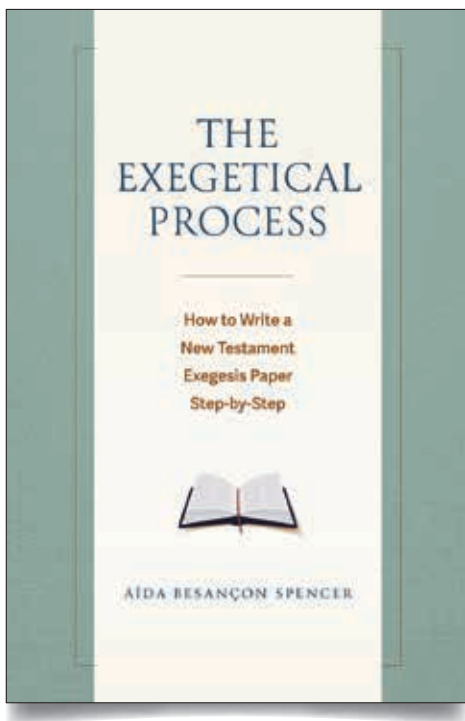
that! Our message came at a crucial time. Doors were being closed that should have remained open. We met some wonderful Argentinians. God also blessed us by our meeting some people there who were interested in having our latest works translated into Spanish for Argentina and Portuguese for Brazil.

The door at Gordon-Conwell has been great and productive for me, principally because the school gave me the opportunity to use the spiritual and educational gifts in teaching and writing to communicate God's word. The desires of my heart were able to be fulfilled! I have taught 43 years at Gordon-Conwell and for four years earlier in Newark, NJ and written over 200 articles, chapters, and books, many together with my husband. Among the 20 books is my latest *The Exegetical Process*, where I distilled all the information I gathered and taught in New Testament Interpretation for 47 years (both in Massachusetts and New Jersey). I developed it into one accessible tool for studying the New Testament for both Greek and non-Greek learners. I could not have begun without a scholarship from Gordon-Conwell.

So, my three suggestions are to keep on your mission to raise scholarships for needy students, work together in community, and keep attuned to God's will.

Your spiritual gifts may be different from mine, but, whatever they are, when you use them, you will be affirmed by God who wants all of us to be used in promoting God's kingdom. Amen!

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The Active, Personal Presence of the Risen Lord and the Holy Spirit during Celebrations of Baptism and the Lord's Supper: Recovering Forgotten Realities of New Testament and Early Christian Worship

JOHN JEFFERSON DAVIS

INTRODUCTION

According to the New Testament scholar Ralph P. Martin, the hallmark of early Christian worship, for which other religions of the time could provide no true parallel, was the vivid sense of “...the presence of the living Lord in the midst of his own... All the components of divine service were calculated to lead the worshippers to an awareness of his presence.”¹ These components of worship services would have included baptisms and the Lord's Supper. In his seminal article, “Worship as Divine Action,” C.E.B. Cranfield argued that, in such acts of worship, “...the chief actor is not man but God...” inasmuch as the risen Christ renews his promise to be present, through the Spirit, with his church (Matt 28:20; John 14:16–18)²—a promise “renewed again and again.”³ In this understanding, the risen Christ, was not only present by his Spirit during baptisms and eucharists—as an observer—but present and *acting*—as the divine, exalted Son, to confer the Spirit upon new converts, and to enjoy table fellowship with his people. If Cranfield is correct, biblical worship is not merely a human event, with only humans present and active. Rather, true worship is a divine–human event—with both humans and God mutually present, engaged in dynamic interactions of revelation and response.

This article's thesis is that a felt sense of an active, personal presence of the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit during celebrations of baptisms and the Lord's Supper—a sense characteristic of much New Testament and early Christian worship can—and should be—recovered and experienced in churches today.

The outline of the article is as follows: First, a brief discussion of factors in church history that contributed to declining awareness of the risen Christ's and Holy Spirit's presence and involvement during adult⁴ baptisms and communion. Second and third, presentation of New Testament and early Christian evidence for such involvement with these sacraments. Fourth, and finally, specific suggestions for the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper consistent with the New Testament evidence, together with brief observations about the benefits of these enhancements for worship in the context of modern secular cultures.

I. FADING AWARENESS OF THE RISEN CHRIST AND THE SPIRIT

Several developments in post-biblical church history contributed to a fading awareness of the presence and activity of the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit during the administration of baptism and the eucharist: the predominance of infant baptism after A.D. 600; the growth of cessationist views concerning the Holy Spirit; the Reformers' reactions to the Roman Catholic doctrines of baptismal regeneration and transubstantiation; reactions to the Pentecostal doctrine of speaking in tongues as the “initial physical evidence” of baptism with the Spirit.

In the fourth century, there is evidence that adult converts had conscious experiences of receiving the Holy Spirit at their baptisms. Consider, for example, the testimony of Hilary of

1 Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1964), 130.

2 ALL SCRIPTURE TAKEN FROM NIV.

3 C.E.B. Cranfield, “Divine and Human Action: The Biblical Concept of Worship,” *Interpretation* 12 (1958): 358–398 at 387.

4 It is not the purpose of this article to discuss infant baptism, or the biblical arguments for or against this practice. Likewise, it is beyond the purpose to discuss issues concerning the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” and the continuation or cessation of signs such as tongues or prophecy associated with it.

Poitiers, a bishop and important Trinitarian theologian, concerning his own baptism as an adult:

We who have been reborn through the sacrament of baptism experience intense joy when we feel within us the first stirrings of the Holy Spirit . . . Among us there is no one, who from time to time, does not feel the grace of the Spirit . . . We begin to have insight into the mysteries of faith, we are able to prophesy and to speak with wisdom. We become steadfast in hope and receive the gifts of healing.⁵

It seems clear that Hilary believed that his experiences were not unique to him but were also typical of believers in churches known to him.

However, by A.D. 600 adult baptisms were becoming rare in Western Europe, and infant baptism was the normal way one became a member of the church.⁶ The Roman Catholic teaching of baptismal regeneration held that the church's rite washed away the stain of original sin and made the child a "believer" (*fidelis*).⁷ Such infants could not, of course, report the type of conscious experiences of the reception of the Spirit described by Hilary and others in the early church. As infant baptism became the norm, the extensive catechetical instruction typical in the early church fell into disuse.⁸ Diminished biblical instruction—including teaching about the Holy Spirit—led to both diminished expectations of and conscious experiences of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The lack of biblical teaching about the Holy Spirit also contributed to increasingly cessationist views of the Spirit, especially after the fourth and fifth centuries.⁹ A disconnect between water baptism and a conscious reception of the Holy Spirit had been set in place—a disconnect that has continued in later church history—including modern evangelicalism.

The Reformers' biblically justifiable rejection of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the baptismal regeneration of infants also had unintended consequences. According to Catholic teaching, the baptism of an infant washes away the stain of original sin, affects spiritual regeneration and birth into a new life, such that the baptized become temples of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ The Reformers' justifiable rejection of the notion of an almost automatic,¹¹ guaranteed regeneration of the infant by the Holy Spirit tended to reinforce an already diminished connection between (adult) baptism and reception of the Spirit—a connection clearly attested in Acts 2:38 and other New Testament texts.

Protestant debates about the administration of water baptism have tended to focus on its proper subjects and modes—adult converts only vs. adult believers and their children; or immersion vs. sprinkling—to the neglect of the gift of the Spirit promised to converts. In the modern period, reactions to Pentecostal claims that speaking in tongues is the "initial physical evidence" of a "baptism of the Holy Spirit"—as a second experience *subsequent* to conversion—has also deflected

5 Hilary of Poitiers, *Tract on the Psalms*, 64:14, and *Tract on Psalm 118*, 118:12, cited in Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 151.

6 Joseph Jungmann, "Catechumenate," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, v.3 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 238–40.

7 J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, "Early Views of the Sacraments" (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 193–99.

8 Michael Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate* (New York: Sadler, 1979). On the extensive nature of catechetical instruction in the early church, see also the valuable study of Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016).

9 On the history of Protestant cessationism in the modern, post-Reformation period, see Jon Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Post-biblical Miracles* (Tulsa, OK: Word & Spirit, 2011). McDonnell and Montague (n. 5 above, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*) in their extensive review of the patristic evidence conclude that the charismatic gifts and experiences of the conscious reception of the Holy Spirit, while diminishing in the post-Constantinian churches, did not entirely disappear and were evident as late as the eighth century.

10 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994), "The Grace of Baptism," 1279, 325.

11 In Catholic sacramental theology, the term *ex opere operato* (lit., "by the very fact of the act being performed") refers to the objective validity of the priestly action being performed, irrespective of the personal merits of the minister or the recipient. The doctrine was formally approved at the Council of Trent, session 7, *de sacramentis in genere*, canon 8; "Ex Opere Operato," *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, F.L. Cross, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 484.

attention away from the teaching of Acts 2:38 and its promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit as an experience to be expected *concurrent* with conversion.

The Reformers' rejection of the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation—a rejection that was biblically and theologically justified—had unforeseen and unintended consequences for Protestant understandings and practices of the Lord's Supper.¹² The Catholic view—incorporating Aquinas' use of Aristotelean categories to posit a miraculous change in the substance of the bread and wine into the real, though invisible, body and blood of Christ—at least had the merit of retaining a sense of a supernatural presence of Christ during the celebration of the mass. In reaction to this faulty understanding, the (bare) memorial (“Zwinglian”) view of the Lord's Supper held in many Protestant churches amounted, according to some critics, to a “real absence” view: Christ only in heaven, absent from table, not really spiritually present, but only mentally called to mind by his followers. Such a “real absence” understanding neglects the promises of texts such as John 14:16–18, Matthew 18:20, and Matthew 28:20—discussed below—where Christ promises to be present with his people by the Spirit, as they gather in his name for worship and mission. The liturgical scholar Martin Heineken has noted that, in the New Testament period, in the celebration of the Lord's Supper “the risen, living Christ was believed to be present. There is no intimation that this meal was only a reminder of either a past event or an absent loved one.”¹³

II. BAPTISM, THE RISEN CHRIST, AND THE SPIRIT

Baptism in the New Covenant is not just a human action, but a divine and supernatural action of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—divine Persons present at baptisms as the most important actors. Christian baptism signifies not only the forgiveness of sins, but also the gift and filling of the Holy Spirit; fellowship with God; God's love being poured into the heart; and the conferral of a new identity as a beloved child of God. The rich meaning and varied dimensions of baptism in the New Testament are *prefigured* in the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by John the Baptist (Matt 3:13–17); *promised* by Jesus after his resurrection and prior to his ascension (Acts 1:4, 5: “you shall receive power”); *delivered* to the earliest disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33: “Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear”); and then *extended* to all who repent and are baptized (Acts 2:38: “Repent, and be baptized, every one of you... and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”). The filling of the Holy Spirit begun in baptism is to be continued as a continuing state in the Christian's worship (Eph 5:18–19), daily living, and service: “Keep on being filled with the Spirit.”

In Matthew's account of the baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:13–17; cf. Mark 1:9–12; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:29–34), John is the human agent who baptizes with water, preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John is puzzled by Jesus' request, viewing him as the spotless Lamb of God (John 1:29) who should need no baptism for the forgiveness of sins. John did not realize at the time that Jesus was not being baptized for any sins of his own, but rather as his people's representative and the vicarious bearer of their sins.

All three divine Persons were personally present and active at Jesus' baptism. God the Father—Jesus' divine “godfather,” so to speak, and covenant witness—speaks from heaven: “This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased.” Jesus, the human recipient of John's water baptism, is in fact the eternal divine Son, now present as incarnate (John 1:14), who, together with the Father, sends the Spirit into the world and upon his disciples (John 14:15; 15:26). Jesus the Son baptizes us with the Spirit. At the Jordan River, God the Father blessed his Son and baptized him with the Spirit.

12 On the doctrine of transubstantiation, and the history of Protestant reactions to it, see John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), “The Eucharist: Meeting the Risen Christ at the Table,” 113–137.

13 Martin J. Heineken, “An Orientation Toward the Lord's Supper Today,” in *Meaning and Practice of the Lord's Supper*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 180–81.

The words of the Father reveal Jesus’—and subsequently, our—true identity: *a beloved Son with whom God the Father is well pleased*. The question of Jesus’ true identity—often contested or misunderstood during his ministry, even by his disciples—is clearly and emphatically declared by the Father at the very outset. Before facing Satan’s temptations in the wilderness, or opposition in Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem, Jesus is grounded in the love and favor of God. Jesus’ experience prefigures ours: we need to be confirmed in the love of God before we can love God in return and serve God effectively in ministry.

The Father’s voice from heaven and the descent and anointing of Jesus by the Spirit in the visible form of a dove (Matt 3:16) ended centuries of silence when God’s voice was not heard in the living voice of prophecy and the Spirit was no longer apparent and active in the lives of God’s people.¹⁴ The visible arrival of the Spirit at Jesus’ baptism signified that baptism was an action of the New Covenant—in contrast to John’s baptism, still under the Old—and it was to be integrally connected to the giving of the Holy Spirit to all who repented and believed in Jesus as God’s Son and Messiah.

Our baptisms, prefigured by Jesus’, also signify our new and truer identity: that of beloved sons or daughters of God, children with whom God is well pleased. What Jesus was by right, from eternity, we become, upon conversion, and by the grace of adoption, beloved children who likewise are given the Spirit. Like Jesus, we can cry out, “Abba, Father,” in a renewed warm and intimate relationship with the Father (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15–16). Our close fellowship and communion in the Spirit is not only with Jesus, but with both the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3).

Like Jesus, being filled with the Spirit at baptism (Luke 4:1a; cf. Acts 9:17–18, Paul; Acts 19:1–7, disciples at Ephesus), we can then be led by the Spirit when facing temptation (cf. Luke 4:1b, Jesus in the desert; Romans 8:13–14, resisting sinful desires as sons and daughters led by the Spirit). Like Jesus, who returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14), anointed by the Spirit for the reading of scripture (Luke 4:18), we too are meant by God to be empowered by the Spirit as his witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), testifying for him with courage, power, and words given by the Spirit of the Father (Matt 10:20).

A crucial element of baptism prefigured in Jesus’ baptism—receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit—had been anticipated in Old Testament promises (see below). Both John the Baptist and Jesus spoke of such a promise that God was now beginning to fulfill. John recognized that his baptism in water for the repentance of sins was in a real sense incomplete, partial, and only preparatory—preparatory for the baptism by one greater, who would baptize with “the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matt 3:12). During the forty-day period between his resurrection and ascension, Jesus commanded the disciples to “...wait for the gift my Father promised . . . John baptized with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4–5). An implication of Jesus’ command to “wait” is that Jesus intended his disciples to *expect* such a gift consciously—and, further, that just as the disciples had been conscious of being washed in physical water by John, so would they be conscious of having received the spiritual water of the Spirit in a further baptism that completed the first.

Which Old Testament texts might Jesus and John the Baptist have had in mind when they thought of such a “gift,” or of the “promise of the Father”? Surely, Joel 2:28–32, comes to mind since God promises to pour out his Spirit on “all flesh,” —in other words, the covenant community generally—sons and daughters, old and young, male and female servants—and not only upon prophets, priests, and kings. Less well known is the promise in Ezekiel 39:29: “I will no longer hide my face from them [the people of Israel], for I will pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Sovereign Lord.” Earlier in his prophecies, Ezekiel had foreseen a time when God

14 According to a rabbinic tradition, Tosefta Sotah 13:4 (dated c. 190–230 C.E.), after the death of the last prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—the Holy Spirit ceased to be present in Israel: https://www.sefaria.org/Tosefta_Sotah.13.4?lang=bi, accessed October 2, 2024.

would give his people a new heart and a new spirit within them, giving them a living heart that would move them to follow his decrees and to obey his laws (Ezek 36:26–27).¹⁵ In his famous imagery of the Valley of Dry Bones (Ezek 37:6,14), the prophet foresees a time when the Spirit will cause the spiritually dead and hopeless people in exile in Babylon to come spiritually alive again.

Isaiah foresees a time when the Lord will “...pour out water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground... I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants” (Isa 44:3). This promise of renewed covenant blessing through the Spirit extended to grandchildren, perhaps to even more distant descendants: “This is my covenant with them... My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, will not depart from the mouths of your children... or... their descendants from this time and forever, says the Lord” (Isa 59:21).¹⁶

The gift of the Holy Spirit *promised* by Jesus both before (John 14:16) and after his resurrection (Acts 1:4,5) was *delivered* by Jesus to the disciples more privately on Easter Sunday night (John 20:22: “... he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”, and then more publicly on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4; 33: “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit... Exalted to the right hand of God, he [Jesus]...received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and poured out what you now see and hear”). Jesus, as the true Israel, the head of the church, and the exalted Son and Messiah, was the first to experience the reception of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost and then shared this gift with his disciples on earth below.

The individual and interior experiences of the reception of the Spirit are indicated in a variety of texts. After his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands by Ananias, after which he received water baptism (Acts 9:17–18). Reception of the Spirit—as an adult convert—was a conscious experience for Paul, inasmuch as his temporary blindness was immediately relieved: “Immediately something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again” (v.18).

Describing the reception of the Holy Spirit by the Corinthians in their conversion experiences, the apostle Paul states that “...we were all baptized with¹⁷ one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor 12:13). Paul had in fact performed water baptism for some of the Corinthians—Crispus and Gaius, and the household of Stephanas (1 Cor 1:14–17)—but in 1 Corinthians 12:13, his emphasis is not on water baptism, but on baptism with the Spirit—a baptism with the one and the same Spirit that unifies them, irrespective of the diversity of spiritual gifts that have been given to the church (1 Cor 12:4, “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit”).

The reference to being given the one Spirit to “drink” (*epotistheimen*: aorist active indicative, first person plural of *potizo*, “to drink”) recalls the language of Jesus in John’s gospel, in which the Spirit is described as “living water” that satisfies spiritual thirst and flows from within the believer’s heart (John 7:37–39; cf. John 4:10–14, Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman). The “living water” of the Spirit is pictured not only as an external washing that cleanses from sin, but also as

15 Jeremiah’s expectation that God will write his law upon the hearts of his people in a new covenant (Jer 31:33), would seem to presuppose a new work of the Spirit, even though the Spirit is not explicitly mentioned. Elsewhere Jeremiah does speak of God as a “spring of living water” (cf. John 4:10, 14; 7:37–39: water as an image of the Spirit), and the righteous being like trees planted by the water that never fail to bear fruit (Jer 17:8).

16 Texts such as Isa 44:3 and 59:21, with their promises of the blessing of the Spirit for “descendants,” may have informed Peter’s statement on the day of Pentecost, that the “... promise is for you *and your children* [italics added].”

17 The preposition used here (*hen*) can be translated “in, with, or by.” The translation adopted here—“with”—is consistent with the view that the Spirit is the spiritual medium of Spirit baptism, just as water is the physical medium of water baptism. In this understanding, Jesus is the divine—now exalted—agent who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, consistent with the preaching of John the Baptist: “I baptize with water . . . but after me will come one who is more powerful than I . . . He [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt 3:11; cf. Acts 2:3, “tongues of fire”; Acts 2:33, “he has poured out what you now see and hear”). As noted by Fee, the dative of *hen* in relation to the Spirit and baptism is best understood as the Spirit being the element with which or in which the believer is baptized, rather than the Spirit as the active agent doing the baptism: Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 606.

an internal drinking that gives life to the soul. Just as one is consciously aware of drinking a cup of literal water, so the assumption here in 1 Corinthians 12:13 is that the Corinthians had some conscious awareness of *drinking* the spiritual water of the Spirit.

Romans 5:5, “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who he has given us,” is one of the most significant New Testament texts connecting the reception of the Spirit and the experience of conversion. The apostle Paul assumes that being justified through faith (Rom 5:1) as a new convert will be accompanied by new, conscious experiences of peace, rejoicing, and hope (Rom 5:1, 3, 4). The verb “poured out” (*ekkechutai*, perf. pass. of *ekcheo*) signifies an abundant effusion of the love of God into the believer’s heart.¹⁸ The same verb for “poured out” in Acts 2:33—a public act on the day of Pentecost—here in Romans 5:5 denotes a private and interior “Pentecost” for each believer.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter extended the offer of the gift of the Holy Spirit to all who were willing to repent and believe:

Repent and be baptized . . . and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call to himself (Acts 2:38–39).

The gift of the Holy Spirit, completing the baptism of water for repentance, had been announced and promised by John the Baptist: “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matt 3:11). Peter’s addition of the words “and for your children” (Acts 2:39a) would seem to be a reflection of the words of Joel 2:28b, “Your sons and daughters will prophesy.”

The words “...and for all who are far off” (Acts 2:39b) may have been called to Peter’s mind by Jesus’ post-resurrection commands to be his witnesses to “all nations” (Matt 28:19) — including Gentiles. Peter subsequently preached the gospel to Cornelius and his Gentile household, and they received the Holy Spirit concurrently with their believing (Acts 10:35; 11:17, 15:8).

Generally speaking, in most evangelical churches today, water baptism is not performed with an expectation of a conscious awareness of the reception of the Spirit. The Acts 2:38 connection between “Repent...be baptized...and...*receive the gift of. The Holy Spirit*” needs to be recovered, taught, and practiced today.

III. THE LORD’S SUPPER, THE RISEN CHRIST, AND THE SPIRIT

As noted in the introduction, this article addresses the questions, What difference would it make if awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit and the risen Christ during worship was more fully integrated into our celebrations of baptism and the Lord’s Supper?¹⁹ What difference could it make if the celebration of the supper was understood to be taking place in a worship service with both the people and the celebrant “filled with the Spirit”—and Jesus himself present by his word and Spirit? The key idea to be argued is that

The risen Christ, according to his promises, and by his Spirit, is *present* at his table as an *active participant* and host of the meal—desiring to enjoy table fellowship with his people.

Key texts to be discussed in support of this claim include Matthew 18:20 (“Where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them”); Matthew 28:20b (“Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”); John 14:16, 18, 23 (“the Father will give you another Counselor to be with you forever...I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you...we will come and make our home with him”); and Revelation 3:20 (“Here I am! I stand at the door and

¹⁸ Fritz Reinecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 359.

¹⁹ In the following, the terms “Lord’s Supper”, “communion”, and “eucharist” will be used synonymously and interchangeably.

knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me”). Also to be considered will be texts in the Gospels in which Jesus—both before and after the resurrection—enjoys table fellowship with his disciples, together with Old Testament texts describing covenant meals.

This discussion should also be set in the wider context of a major theme in biblical theology that unfolds from Genesis to Revelation: *the presence of God who dwells with his people*. The divine presence is lost when humanity is exiled from the Garden, and much of subsequent biblical revelation is the story of God’s initiative in bringing his people home from exile to once again bring them back into his presence to enjoy fellowship with them. Ezekiel sees the glory of God departing from the people (Ezek 10:18), but he and the post-exilic prophets foresee a time when God will return to Jerusalem to dwell in the midst of his people and fill a new temple with a greater glory (Ezek 43:1–5; Haggai 2:7; Zech 2:5; 8:3). These texts, (together with the texts such as Joel 2:28, 29; Isa 44:3; 59:21; Ezek 37:14; 39:29) in which God promises to pour out his Spirit again on his covenant people, indicate that acts of worship, including baptism and the Lord’s supper, performed in the new temple, the New Testament church, will be performed in the presence of God himself. A Spirit-filled church (Eph 5:18–19) is a temple of God (Eph 2:21–22) in which God lives by his Spirit, an assembly in which the living God, God the Father, is really present with his people, being “over all and through all, and in all” (Eph 4:5b).

Just as was the case for baptism, the Reformers’ reaction to faulty Roman Catholic teachings on the mass had the unintended effect of disconnecting the Spirit from many Protestant theologies and practices of the Lord’s Supper. The needed biblical critique of the Catholic doctrine of baptismal regeneration, in which the *ex opera operato* act of the priest presumably conferred an infant’s regeneration by the Spirit and cleansing from original sin, in many cases led to a Protestant theology of baptism as a humanly performed ritual in which the Spirit was neither present nor a divine actor.

Similarly, the Reformation critique of the Catholic doctrine of the mass as a meritorious sacrifice for the living and the dead—and the doctrine of transubstantiation that supported it—also contributed to Protestant understandings of the sacrament in which the Spirit and divine presence were marginalized.

The doctrine of transubstantiation, in which the substance of the bread and wine were believed to be miraculously changed into the actual body and blood of Christ, was a (mistaken) way of asserting the supernatural character of this sacrament and the “real presence” of Christ with his people gathered in the church. However, for many in the Protestant and evangelical churches, the rejection of this Catholic understanding of “real presence” led to a “real absence” view of the Lord’s Supper. Christ was physically absent from the church between the time of his ascension and return at the end of history, and the Lord’s table was the occasion to remember Christ’s death in the past—and not so much, if at all, to experience his real presence at the meal through his word and Spirit.

The following texts in the Gospels and Revelation, in which Jesus speaks of his continuing presence in the church, should be understood in the wider context of these promises that God would return to dwell with his people in a new temple—the church—and that the Spirit would be poured out on the covenant people in the latter days.

In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus promises, both before and after his resurrection, that he will continue to be present with them as a gathered church and as his disciple-making witnesses to the world. His statement that “...where two or three come together in my name there am I with them” (Matt 18:20) is in the context of church discipline (Matt 18:15–19). If two disciples in the church are in agreement about a disciplinary dispute to be resolved, Jesus is an unseen but very real and present witness to the matter and will see to it that the matter is settled in heaven (vv. 19–20). The “two or three” who come together do so, not as private individuals, but as members of a corporate

body, the church (cf. v.17, *ekklesia*, “the church”: twice). By implication, the “two or three” in the agreement stipulation that brings the presence of Jesus into the life of the church would not be limited only to cases of church discipline but would be true of other church gatherings such as the observance of the Lord’s supper.

Similarly, after his resurrection and prior to his ascension, Jesus promised his continuing presence to the disciples sent out into the world to make disciples: “...go and make disciples of all nations...surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:19–20). Neither in this “Great Commission” text nor in the earlier church discipline text (Matt 18:20) is the Holy Spirit explicitly mentioned but may be assumed. Earlier in Matthew’s gospel Jesus sends the apostles out to preach the kingdom of heaven and to heal (Matt 10:8–10). If their witness to Christ and the kingdom leads to their arrest and trial, they are not to worry or be anxious, for Jesus promises that the Spirit of the Father will give them the words to say: “...it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Matt 10:20). This text gives some justification to the assumption that the Great Commission text (Matt 28:18–20) also presupposes the presence and assistance of the Spirit—and so, by extension — at the celebration of the supper commanded by Jesus. The Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus (cf. Acts 16:7: “the Spirit of Jesus would not allow Paul and his companions to enter Bithynia”) and it is the Spirit’s presence that makes the risen Lord spiritually present in the church.

New Testament scholars have observed that a vivid sense that the risen Christ, through the Spirit, was present with his people was a common experience in the early church. According to Eckhard Schnabel, “The Jesus followers were convinced that the one God and the exalted Jesus Messiah were present through the Spirit in their lives and in their congregations. This is...the most fundamental ecclesiological conviction of the early church.”²⁰ This observation implies that a *felt presence*, by the Spirit, of the risen Christ was a fundamental reality at early Christian worship services, including at the Lord’s supper.

Schnabel is not alone in this conclusion. According to the New Testament scholar Larry Hurtado, for the earliest Christians “...the worship event was not merely a religious exercise by the participants, an opportunity to re-affirm their beliefs and to engage in ritualized behavior; it was an occasion for the experience...of divine powers...expectations were characteristically high that in the worship setting God would be encountered in demonstrative fashion.”²¹

In another important study of early Christian worship, Ralph P. Martin has observed that a hallmark of Christian worship, distinguishing it from other religions of the Roman empire, was the vivid sense of “...the presence of the living Lord in the midst of his own...All the components were calculated to lead the worshippers to an awareness of His presence.”²² This awareness of the risen Christ’s presence was a fulfillment of Christ’s promise in Matthew 18:20: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst.” According to Martin, New Testament worship characteristically “...stands within the magnetic field of the Holy Spirit.”²³

These observations about early Christian worship support Bishop Handley Moule’s understanding of the Lord’s supper. Moule, an evangelical bishop of the Church of England, speaking at a conference in 1900 stated:

I believe that if our eyes...were opened to the unseen, we should indeed behold our Lord present at our communions. There and then, assuredly...He remembers his promise, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name there I am in the midst of them.” Such special presence...is perfectly mysterious in mode, but absolutely

20 Eckhard J. Schnabel, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023), 900.

21 Larry Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 56, 57.

22 Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, 130.

23 Ibid., 131.

true in fact, no creation of our imagination or emotion, but an object of our faith. I believe that our Lord so present, *not on the table, but at it* [italics added] would be seen himself in our presence to bless the bread and the wine for our holy use, and to distribute them to his disciples...I believe that we should worship him, thus present in the midst of us in his living grace, with unspeakable reverence, joy, and love.²⁴

Moule's vision is that Christ is present in a real, spiritual way, by his promise and Spirit, not *on the table*—contained in the physical elements—but *at the table*, as the host and divine celebrant, enjoying table fellowship with us, his people. The focus is not on the material elements, but on the personal participants, both human and divine, during the *occasion* of the supper. Such a vision is a way of moving beyond some of the historic controversies about the “real presence” of Christ—beyond the polar opposites of transubstantiation on the one hand and “bare memorial” on the other.

The promise of Christ's continuing spiritual presence with us is also attested in the Johannine farewell discourses. Before his betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion, Jesus comforts his disciples with this promise: “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18). Although these words certainly refer to Jesus' post-resurrection, bodily appearances to the disciples,²⁵ the context in John 14:15–23 also strongly suggests a continuing spiritual presence of Jesus to the community through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Jesus will ask the Father, who will send the Paraclete—the Holy Spirit—to be with them forever (John 14:16). Their reception of the Spirit will produce a more intimate relationship with Jesus in which they realize that he is in the Father and that he is in them, and they in him (John 14:20). Jesus is “in” them, in an intimate, perichoretic way of indwelling, just as he and the Father dwell in one another, sharing their interior lives. Jesus will continue to be present to them by being in them, in this indwelling mediated by the Spirit. Additionally, in John 14:23, Jesus promises that both he and the Father will come to them and make their home (*monei*, “abode”) with them. This implies a continuing personal presence of both the Father and Jesus—a presence of which disciples will be consciously aware.

The Holy Spirit in this understanding functions as a personal representative or proxy for Jesus, just as, by way of analogy, an American secretary of state might represent the policies and authority of the president in negotiations with foreign governments. The notion of a spiritual presence of Christ to the gathered church implied in John 14:15–23 is also consistent with texts previously considered—Matthew 18:20 and Matthew 28:20—in which the risen Christ promises a continuing presence to the church on earth, in the context of church discipline and mission, even though, after his ascension, he is no longer physically present.

While Revelation 3:20's words of the risen Christ to the church at Laodicea are not explicitly concerned with the Lord's supper, they are nevertheless quite pertinent to the present discussion. After his words of rebuke to a church grown complacent and lukewarm (3:1–19), Jesus says in

24 Cited in Yngve Brilioth, *Eucharistic Faith and Practice: Evangelical and Catholic* (London: S.P.C.K., 1930), 219.

25 As noted, for example, by Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 651. However, Morris also mentions (n. 54, 651) the comment by Edwin Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1950), that “many commentators ancient and modern” have seen John 14:18 as referring to the coming of the Spirit. For example, J. Ramsey Michaels concludes that the words “I am coming to you” mean that Jesus is promising to come to them in the person of the “advocate...the Spirit of truth, of whom he has just spoken”: Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 785. Klink sees a reference to all three “comings” alluded to in the pericope: the post-resurrection appearances; the second coming; and Jesus' coming in the Spirit: Edward W. Klink, III, *John: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 636. John 14:18 is understood by Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria as referring to the Holy Spirit. According to Chrysostom, Jesus comforts the disciples by promising the Spirit: “...he promises what they required most: his own presence...” (“*Homilies on the Gospel of John* 75.2), cited in Joel C. Elowsky, ed., *John 11-21: Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 142. In similar fashion, Cyril of Alexandria comments that “... Christ promises nothing less than that he will be present and will help those who believe on him through the Spirit, even though he ascends into the heavens after his resurrection from the dead.” (*Commentary on the Gospel of John* 9.1), in Elowsky, 142.

verse 20, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and *eat with him and he with me*” (italics added). This text has at times been used in personal evangelism, viewed as directed to an individual who needs to “open the door” and to invite Christ into the heart for conversion. However, in its original context, Revelation 3:20 is not so much directed at the individual as to a *church* and its corporate life and worship. Evidently, the risen Christ was concerned that this church—even before the end of the first century—had already lost the vivid sense of his presence in its midst, so characteristic of early Christian worship. Jesus wishes to be remembered not only as the one who died for its members in the past, but now also as the living, risen Lord, recognized and welcomed to continue the table fellowship he enjoyed with his disciples during his earthly ministry. Jesus wishes to be a “real presence” to the Laodiceans—and to us—not by *being eaten* in elements on the table—but rather by *eating with* us at the table, in a spiritual manner, through the mediation of the Spirit. The notion of a presence of the risen Christ to the church at Laodicea by the Spirit would seem to be consistent with the earlier statement in Revelation 3:6: “He who has an ear, let him hear what *the Spirit* (emphasis added) says to the churches.” The present tense of the verb (*legei*, “says, is saying”) indicates that the Spirit has not just spoken in the past, but continues to speak in the present. The same Spirit that speaks Christ’s words to the churches can mediate his personal presence as well.

G. K. Beale states that the focus in Revelation 3:20 (“I will come in”) is on the immediate present and conditional coming of Christ to the church, rather than on the final coming at the Parousia. He observes that this present coming—in a spiritual and not bodily sense—is consistent with the durative sense of *esteika* (“I stand”) and the present active sense of *krouo* (“knock”).²⁶

Various commentators have drawn attention to the eucharistic allusions in this text, as, for example, G.B. Caird:

The promise that Christ **will come in and have supper** (emphasis original) has a eucharistic flavor about it. The mention of a **supper** with Christ could hardly fail to conjure up pictures of the last supper in the upper room and of subsequent occasions when that meal had been re-enacted as the symbol of Christ’s continuing presence. This reference is of peculiar importance for our understanding of John’s theology: for that sacrament is a clear indication that the early church believed in a coming of Christ that was an anticipation of his Parousia.²⁷

In agreement with Caird, Stephen Smalley sees this text’s language as “. . . resonant with eucharistic associations to describe a coming of the Lord which is intimate and personal.” He notes that the verb *deipneo* (“eat, dine”) and the cognate noun *deipnon* (“meal, supper”) are used elsewhere in the New Testament in the context of the Last Supper (Luke 22:20; John 13:2, 4; 21:20) and of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:20, 21, 25).²⁸

Brian K. Blount states that, if the Laodiceans “hear” Christ knocking, and respond to him, then—and only then—will Christ enter the church and have supper with them. “Only at that point *will they eat the Eucharist in his presence* (emphasis added) instead of tricking themselves into thinking that they do.”²⁹ Seen in the light of Christ’s promises in John 14:18 (“I will come to you”), Matthew 18:20 (“where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them”), and Matthew 28:20 (“I will be with you to the end of the age”), Revelation 3:20 can help us to recover the experience of the early Christians in which the Lord’s Supper was a dynamic experience of table fellowship with the risen Christ, in the Spirit.

²⁶ G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 308, 309.

²⁷ G.B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 58.

²⁸ Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 102.

²⁹ Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 83.

Sadly, the Reformers' rejection of the Roman Catholic understanding of a real (bodily) presence of Christ in the eucharist—transubstantiation—had the unintended effect of leaving many later Protestant churches with an understanding of the Lord's Supper that some have called a "real absence" view.³⁰ In such an understanding of the supper, the risen and ascended Christ is absent from the church, until his bodily return at the end of history, and the eucharist is a human action in which the celebrant and people remember Christ's atoning death in the past, with thanksgiving.

The Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation was wrong to locate the real presence of Christ *in the physical elements*, but right to recognize a *supernatural* dimension in the celebration of the rite. The Protestant tradition was right to reject the Catholic understanding of a bodily presence in the elements, but wrong to minimize—especially in "bare memorial" views—a real, spiritual, and supernatural presence of Christ in the occasion and actions of the eucharist.

However, in some representatives of the Reformed tradition, a sense of a real, spiritual presence of Christ was retained. For example, Charles Hodge of old Princeton—a staunch defender of Calvinism—could speak of a presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper "...not local, but spiritual; not to the senses, but to the mind and faith...If the presence is in the promise, then... Christ is present... whenever and wherever he embraces and appropriates the promise."³¹

Hodge quotes with approval³² a statement of Heinrich Bullinger (1564) in the Second Helvetic Confession, ch. XXI, "Of the Holy Supper of the Lord," which clearly affirms a spiritual presence of Christ:

We do not...so join the body of the Lord and his blood with the bread and wine to say that the bread itself is the body of Christ except in a sacramental way...The body of Christ is in heaven at the right hand of the Father, and therefore our hearts are... not to be fixed on the bread, neither is the Lord to be worshipped in the bread. *Yet the Lord is not absent from his Church when she celebrates the Supper.* (italics added) The sun, which is absent from us in the heavens, is notwithstanding effectually present among us. How much more is the Sun of Righteousness, Christ, although in his body he is absent from us in heaven, present with us, not corporeally, but spiritually, by his vivifying operation, and as he himself explained at his Last Supper that he would be present with us (John chs. 14; 15; and 16).³³

Bullinger's view here seems to reflect a statement of Calvin in his discussion of the Lord's Supper, that "...the Spirit truly unites things separated in space."³⁴ The risen, glorified body of Jesus is in heaven, but the Spirit makes Christ spiritually and really present—not on the table, in the elements—but at the table, as guest and celebrant, enjoying fellowship with his disciples.

The English Puritan theologian William Ames (1576–1633) was perhaps the most significant theological influence on the Congregational ministers of colonial New England, second only to Calvin. His exposition of Calvinistic theology, *Medulla Theologiae* ("The Marrow of Theology"), first published in 1627, was—together with the Westminster Confession of Faith—for generations a standard theological text in colonial America. In chapter XL, sections 22 and 23 of the *Medulla*, "On Baptism and the Lord's Supper," Ames forcefully rejects transubstantiation, and affirms a spiritual presence of Christ in the administration of the sacrament:

To pretend any transubstantiation...in this sacrament is, more than in baptism, a kind of blind and stupid superstition...The spiritual nourishment in this sacrament does not

30 On the historical development of the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, the Reformers' critique of it, and subsequent Protestant developments in eucharistic theology, see Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 121–37.

31 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, v. III (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975; orig. 1871–73), 643.

32 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 642.

33 Accessed at <https://www.monergism.com/second-helvetica-confession>, 21 August 2024.

34 Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.10; *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, v.2, tr. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1370.

require that the bread and wine be changed into the body and blood of Christ, or that Christ be corporally present with them. It is required only that they be changed in their application and use, and that Christ be spiritually present with those who receive them in faith.³⁵

Unlike some later Protestant traditions that both rejected transubstantiation and minimized a real spiritual presence, Ames' sacramental theology rejected transubstantiation, but affirmed a real spiritual presence of Christ—not in the elements, but during the celebration of the sacrament.

In American church history, an awareness of a real, spiritual presence of Christ at the communion table was not limited to colonial New England. During the Kentucky and Cane Ridge frontier revivals of 1803 witnesses reported celebrations of the Lord's Supper at "communion seasons" in which the presence and power of the Spirit were palpable. The Presbyterian evangelist James McGready marveled at "God's power and presence" at the Red River camp meeting of 1803:

So many souls happy in the love of God, I never saw on earth before...The exercise at the tables was indeed a heaven upon earth. Christians at the tables, almost universally, from first to last, were so filled with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, that they might, with propriety, be compared to bottles filled with new wine.³⁶

According to McGready, these occasions were so glorious as to resemble the "descent of the New Jerusalem" depicted in the twenty-first chapter of the book of Revelation.³⁷ Such "communion fairs" and had been integral parts of revivals since the seventeenth century down to the 1840s, in both Scotland and America—until eclipsed by the influence of Charles Finney's revival methods that climaxed with altar calls at the "anxious bench"—rather than with the Lord's Supper at the communion table.³⁸

IV. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS AND A FINAL OBSERVATION

This article has proposed a retrieval of two important realities in New Testament and early Christian worship: the real *personal presence* and *active agency* of the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit during the celebrations of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Texts from the Gospels, Epistles, and Acts were cited as evidence that, in the New Testament, baptism and the Lord's Supper are not only natural human actions, focused primarily on visible elements of water, bread, and wine, but, rather, are divine and supernatural actions of God, centered on the invisible and spiritual actions of the risen Lord and the Holy Spirit.

Texts such as Matthew 18:20; 28:20; John 14:18, Revelation 3:20 and others were cited to show that Christ promised to be present, after his ascension, to his disciples gathered as a church. Though absent in the body, he would be present in the Spirit—sharing, through baptism, the Spirit that he himself received from the Father (Acts 2:33), and coming to continue from heaven the table fellowship he enjoyed with them on earth (Rev 3:20).

The Holy Spirit's ongoing presence and activity in the church is attested not only in promises such as John 14:16 ("another Counselor to be with you forever"); Acts 1:8 ("You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you"); or Acts 2:38 ("Repent, be baptized ... and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"), but also in texts that teach that the Spirit is essential to the very being of the church. The church is a holy temple in which God dwells by his Spirit (Eph 2:21, 22; 1 Cor 3:16). In this holy temple, the power of the Lord is present (1 Cor 5:4), and the Spirit, together

35 William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, tr. and ed., John D. Eusden (Boston: Pilgrim, 1968), 212.

36 Cited in Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 63–64.

37 Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*.

38 See John D. Witvliet, "Theological Issues in the Frontier Worship Tradition in Nineteenth Century America," in Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 179–200, on the influence of Finney and the diminishing role of the Lord's Supper.

with the Father and the Son, is actively working as his people exercise their spiritual gifts in ministry (1 Cor 12:4–6). When Jesus comes in the Spirit to dine with his people at the communion table (Rev 3:20), the church to which he comes is a community commanded to be continually filled with the Spirit, giving thanks to God in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph 5:18–19).

These New Testament texts on the presence of Christ and the Spirit—not only at baptisms and eucharists—but with the church generally—are consistent with the Old Testament promises that God would return to be present with his people in a new temple in which he would live forever (Ezek 37:26–28; 43:7; Zech 1:16; 2:10; 8:3) and fill anew with his glory (Ezek 43:5; Hag 2:7). In the context of the biblical metanarrative, the overarching purpose of God’s redemptive work is indeed the restoration of his living presence with his people (Exod 29:46, “that I might dwell among them”). As Moses recognized, it was indeed the presence of Yahweh, the living God, among them, that distinguished Israel—and now, the church—from “all the other people on the face of the earth” (Exod 33:16).

Scholars of early Christian worship have shown that the hallmark of these early assemblies was a felt sense of “...*the presence of the living Lord in the midst of his own*.”³⁹ This sense of the presence of the risen Christ, by the Spirit, in the worship services, was “...the most fundamental ecclesiological conviction of the early church.”⁴⁰ These scholars would concur with C.E.B. Cranfield in his conclusion that, in New Testament worship, in each particular act—which would include baptism and the eucharist—“the chief actor is not man, but God...his divine action consisting in the fulfillment of his promise, ‘Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age’ (Matt 28:20)...his presence is an event, renewed again and again... The risen and exalted Lord comes again and again in fulfillment of his promise to be with his church.”⁴¹ The account in Revelation 3:20 of Christ coming to the church in Laodicea, discussed above, should be read in this light.

The Reformers’ much needed critiques of the Roman Catholic doctrines of baptismal regeneration and transubstantiation had—sadly—the unintended effects of reducing, for many Protestants, a felt sense of the active, personal presence of Christ during the administration of the sacraments. The traditional Catholic practices appeared to reduce a personal awareness of the Holy Spirit by faith to a magic-like ritual action of a priest who pronounced the prescribed words. The Reformation’s rejection of these Catholic doctrines left many Protestant churches with views of the sacraments focused on the visible actions of the human agents and the visible elements—water; bread; wine—to the neglect of the invisible, but real, supernatural actions of the risen Christ, present and *acting* by the Spirit.

In more recent church history, the rise of the Pentecostal movement, and the much-disputed teaching that the “initial physical evidence” of the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” is speaking in tongues—has produced, in many Reformed and Baptist churches, a reluctance to teach about or expect any felt experiences of the Spirit during the administration of water baptism. These understandable reactions to Pentecostal teachings about tongues as “evidence” of having the “baptism” of the Spirit have had the unintended consequence of deflecting attention away from the integral connection of faith, repentance, and reception of the gift of the Spirit attested by Acts 2:38 and elsewhere in the New Testament.

A recovery of the New Testament and early church experience of the real, spiritual presence of the risen Christ during adult baptisms⁴² and communion could be facilitated in some very specific and practical ways. With respect to baptism, the preaching of a text such as Acts 2:38 could call

39 Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, 130.

40 Schnabel, *New Testament Theology*, 900.

41 C.E.B. Cranfield, “Divine and Human Action: The Biblical Concept of Worship,” *Interpretation* 12 (1958): 358–398 at 387.

42 As noted earlier, it is not the purpose of this article to address the many issues related to the baptism of infants—either with respect to the biblical arguments for this practice, or the possible actions of the Spirit in the infants so baptized.

attention to the integral connection, in Christian conversion, of faith, repentance, and reception of *the gift of the Holy Spirit*. Reception of the Spirit should be taught as an integral element of the Good News—part of the “package deal,” so to speak—of the Gospel itself. The historical factors that contributed to this disconnect should be included in the pre-baptismal teachings as well.

Additional pre-baptismal teaching about the Holy Spirit’s role in the Christian life generally—as the necessary empowerment for obedience, service, and spiritual growth—together with a laying on of hands and prayer for the convert’s reception of the gift of the Spirit—could help recover the richness of the early church’s worship.

With respect to the Lord’s Supper, an enhanced administration of this ordinance could begin with a reading and brief commentary on Revelation 3:14–20, focusing on v. 20. Jesus comes, in the Spirit, to be present to the church, wishing not *to be eaten* but to *eat with them*—to continue the table fellowship that he enjoyed with his disciples during his earthly ministry. The celebrant could comment that the focus here is not on *physical elements*, but rather, on the *occasion*—an event in which the risen Christ, the true host and honored guest, is present, by the Spirit, not *on* the table—but *at* the table. Matthew 18:20; 28:20; and John 14:16–18—where Jesus promises his ongoing spiritual presence to the church—could be referenced, and the passage from Bishop Handley Moule on Christ’s spiritual presence at the table (cited above) read. The words of institution (1 Cor 11:23–27) would then follow and the service continued in the manner customary for the congregation.

These changes, framing baptism and the Lord’s Supper in a theological schemata that sees both sacraments in terms of both divine and human agents—and which recognizes the presence of the risen Christ at both by his promises and his Spirit—could help to restore in our contemporary churches a sense of the holy and transcendent presence of God that characterized New Testament and early Christian worship. This would help to distinguish our Sunday worship services from other human gatherings in our overly busy, distracted, and overstimulated culture. It might even cause a visitor, who happened to visit our churches when a baptism or communion was being celebrated, to exclaim, “God is really among you!” (1 Cor 14:25).

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Theological Hermeneutics in the Age of AI: Hermeneutics of Faith

NICHOLAS KEUNE

INTRODUCTION

Authorial intention has been an historically important hermeneutic tool. However, the current use in modern hermeneutics will become increasingly problematic for a generation reared in the world of Artificial Intelligence (AI) generated meaningful texts. AI generated meaningful texts (that is, where a normal reader will understand an intention to communicate something) already are a source of confusion and disillusionment for readers who expect a human author behind such a text. The significance of the potential disillusionment is exacerbated by a hermeneutical theory that unconditionally prioritizes and elevates the role of an anonymous author, such as the moral hermeneutic of Dr. Vanhoozer.¹ Dr. Vanhoozer teaches the reader to have a high regard for the author, but unfortunately that can lead to disillusionment when the author turns out not to be human. To defend against this disillusionment, I propose a *hermeneutics of faith*, where the obligation of the reader to the author depends on factors outside of the text itself.

The proposed remediation is an expansion of authorial intention, which requires considering the commitment of the authors made public by their lives. The authors' lived commitments provide personal involvement and authentication for their textual claims. AI systems can produce compelling texts, but do not live or stay committed to what they have written. The proposed authentication will be a pre-condition before the literary event, allowing the reader to be properly prepared to approach the truth claims of the text and avoid a disillusionment regarding the revealed author. The aspirational result will be preservation of trust in the role of an author, which is important for equipping future generations of exegetes to defend Scripture as authoritative and reliable within a rapidly changing context of reader to author relationships.

THESIS AND SCOPE

The goals of this article are threefold. First, to describe how increasingly sophisticated and prevalent use of AI generated texts is liable to fuel disillusionment and skepticism toward the author of a text. Second, to highlight how hermeneutic theories with a high view of authorial intention may exacerbate this disillusionment. Third, to offer a path forward for theological hermeneutics by suggesting the story formed community as a helpful, readily available, and biblically founded² extension to Dr. Vanhoozer's model for authorial intention.

The *hermeneutics of faith* is a synthesis of a hermeneutics with the discernment that commitments to truth claims are corporately and privately lived out. It can be seen as a theological hermeneutics strengthened by appeal to the public commitments of the community. When considering religious texts, these public commitments are observed in faithful commitment and unity with Christ. The faith community participates in the life of Christ, becoming a living authentication of the Truth we proclaim by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ's transformative power to reorient our values and submission to God instead of sin is proof that the kingdom is present. The proposed experiential and non-literary authorization defends biblical truth claims by grounding these texts in the authority which is the living Christ. The reader can then discern how to interact with the content and author of a text based on this pre-linguistic consideration of the lived commitments (faith) of the author.

SCOPE

This article is focused on the problematic impact of AI generated texts on the hermeneutics and

1 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

2 In much the same way as the Corinthians were encouraged by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3.

authorial trust of future generations. My goal in writing is to act before a generation of Christian exegetes, surrounded by AI produced texts, become irreparably suspicious of authors. Distrust will be sown by firsthand experiences of trusting an assumed human author, only to realize it was an AI. It is a thoroughly practical and not purely theoretical problem.³

This article will not address the related discussion about the degree to which AI texts satisfy our expectations about natural language use. Nor will it answer the ability of AI to use theological concepts correctly. I have addressed these topics elsewhere in depth.⁴ However, a deep and highly technical discussion of both linguistics and AI low-level implementations is not suitable for this setting. It is also unnecessary for the more modest goals of this article.

My argument will proceed as follows. The preliminary step is to describe how current AI systems have sophisticated implementations which parallel the processes and outputs of natural language users. The outputs of AI systems are increasingly recognized as meaningful⁵ and can even rival the meaningfulness of human-generated texts. The goal is not to argue for equality of meaningfulness, but to describe the causes for a reader to recognize an AI generated text as meaningful. The next premise is that human readers are by design and culture inclined to assume that every meaningful text they encounter was produced by a human author. The result of AI generated meaningful texts is therefore the potential for a reader to incorrectly believe the text was produced by a human. The reader is liable to experience disappointment and distrust upon realizing that a meaningful and important text was generated by an AI instead of a human.

After arguing for this potential cause of distrust in authors, I will consider how hermeneutic models with a high view of authors may exacerbate the potential disillusionment caused by meaningful texts generated by AI. I will specifically look at Dr. Vanhoozer and how his theory from *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* can exacerbate the reader's disappointment twofold. First, there is a greater disappointment falling from Vanhoozer's elevated and morally obligated respect of the author to the realized reality of an AI author. Second, Vanhoozer obligates the reader's relationship toward the author based on evidence in the text and the implicit assumption of an exclusive origin for a meaningful text: an intentional human author. Understood this way, Vanhoozer is fallaciously arguing from the consequent: he is using the meaningfulness of the text to conclude an intentional, and, therefore, human, author. His method obligates readers to begin with a high view of the nature of an author based on the text itself, potentially leading to erroneous attributions and disillusionment.

Vanhoozer's *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* is a helpful example of the problem, while his other teaching outside of hermeneutics is a helpful example leading to a *hermeneutic of faith*. In his *Faith Speaking Understanding*, Vanhoozer places emphasis on the community of faith acting out the gospel. He stresses this lived authentication as the obligation of the community of faith. I strongly agree and argue that this authentication is exactly the pre-literary condition missing from his hermeneutical program. My recommended hermeneutic of faith encourages the synthesis of both. Hermeneutic theories are increasingly negligent when making unconditioned statements about authors based exclusively on the linguistic nature of a text. The next generation of interpreters, reared while surrounded by AI, will be best served by a hermeneutic which continually stresses that the authentication of a text comes from the living community/individual performing the claims of the text.

3 Focusing on the practical problem requires the argument that AI texts *may be* incorrectly attributed to humans (producing disillusionment). This article is not making the stronger claim that AI texts *ought* to be considered equivalent to human authored texts.

4 Nicholas A Keune, *Can AI Proclaim Christ? A Theological Investigation of AI's Performance of Christian Proclamation* (Eugene, OR.: Wipf & Stock, 2025).

5 When an AI response includes something that is factually questionable or wrong, it is called a hallucination. A reader's ability to recognize when an AI has made a hallucination implies recognition of an intended meaning which was not achieved. When a human reader has no factual objections to an AI-generated text and can understand the content being conveyed, it is likewise "meaningful" from a linguistics perspective.

As bystanders, we should avoid an unhelpful attitude toward the disillusionment that comes from treating an AI generated text as if it were human created. We may think that we are immune to indeterminacy and can always identify an AI text and reject it as not-meaningful. We might insist that our trust in human authors is unshakable. Not even the mistake (of realizing we have accidentally trusted an AI as if it were human) would shake our high view of authors or give us pause with the next anonymous text. We may argue that these readers are committing a logical fallacy of affirming the consequent: problematically concluding that the meaningfulness of a text inherently requires the intention of a human author. Some or all of these may be true, but none of these solve the problem. We ought not abdicate our obligation to help those who are susceptible to the results of misplaced trust in AI text, particularly when it comes to the confidence of our family in Christ.

I AI GENERATION OF MEANINGFUL TEXTS

Natural language⁶ provides a great deal of flexibility in the meanings ascribed to specific words.⁷ Natural language use is based on a loose (and not strict) sense of the relative meanings for individual words placed into a context. Novel concept usage (that is, when an unfamiliar word / phrase is used to describe a referent, such as a new metaphor) can be recognized as continuing the same trajectory as prior use, even when it is extending the concepts into new contexts or applications.

We may write that “people are a vapor” and be understood as talking about the transience of life, not the physical substance that people are made of. Experience using natural language allows a reader to know reflectively and eventually infer a wide range of senses that are meaningful and potentially intended in any given context. Managing the range of senses which are non-empirical and potentially meant by natural language usage are implemented in AI systems using *embeddings*. AI systems implement natural language contextualization of intended usage by *attention mechanisms* (this is a mathematical representation of the relative semantic focus for a text). Both are important to producing meaningful texts recognized as natural language and will be described in turn.

Embeddings model how a word can carry a semantic range of relations to other words. Use of embeddings implements the insights of functional grammar and structuralism toward the relative sense of word signifiers. It will be helpful to build up from the more basic elements to arrive at a descriptive understanding of embeddings and their role in AI generating meaningful texts.

The representation of a word in an AI system starts with a vector (a mathematical representation of a word in a language: I will use the word “cat” as an example). A very naïve approach to representing the meaning of “cat” would be that each word only represents itself on the vector: “cat” is fully and 100% encoding the meaning “cat,” and encoding 0% of the meaning of any other words (such as “dog,” “feline,” or “potato”). In this naïve model there is no sense of proximity of meaning. There is no semantic clustering of similar words. Such a model would not be very impressive, and this limitation is a by-product of trying to define and enumerate every word/concept beforehand. *Training* the embeddings of a language model is all about using a more sophisticated method to represent words so that the model is better at capturing the relationships between words.

With the naïve approach, at best one could model the likelihood that words follow other words. One might be able to reproduce chains of words that have been observed before. The resulting texts would reflect coarse patterns of words but not the relative sense of words. This is

⁶ Natural language refers to how members of society interact through words.

⁷ This section will draw comparisons between AI language use and the description of concepts proposed by Dr. Hector. Kevin Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics: God, Language, and the Spirit of Recognition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

not what modern AI does, and it is important to dispel this limited and rudimentary model. The intention in mentioning this model is to help non-practitioners appreciate what an AI system is doing is far more sophisticated than this simple example.

AI systems use a pragmatic training approach to build the sense of words, so those words can be contextually applied. To use an example, with proper vector representations of the words “king,” “queen,” “man,” and “woman,” a program could calculate the vector difference between king and queen, and, adding the result to man, would get woman.⁸ Natural users of language understand polyonymies (using multiple words for one thing) and metonymies (use of a word as a substitute for another word). That words will have interrelationships is expected due to their function in describing and interacting with an interrelated reality. From repeated use and correction across many contexts, our understanding of this semantic proximity of the sense of a word is built up. The training of AI systems was designed to implement this same repetitive learning, with the goal of producing the same effect (modeling semantic proximity across the wide range of languages).

Embeddings are a strategy to refine further the semantic sense that is produced through vectorization. Additional “dense” data is included in the vectors to enrich calculations of the semantic proximity within the “semantic space.” A semantic space refers to all the words which are known by the AI system. Mathematically, it is a vector space of those words (those vectors including the enriched embeddings). When an AI system is generating novel text, it chooses the optimal content from this semantic space, based upon the context of the conversation.

Embeddings implement a rich and behavioral concept usage. How language is practically used informs how words are mathematically modeled. The conceptualization of words is neither static nor rigid, with a rich representation of relative meaning which can also be transformed to suit the context of the conversation. Embeddings allow a similar transformation, when combined with a mathematical representation of changing context, called attention. *Attention* is the overarching capability that mathematically implements and describes the context of the conversation. Attention is used both when the AI system is building its understanding of words (training) and when the model is applied to generate novel text.

Attention mechanisms draw on the modeling of the human eye, where the field of vision is broken into smaller subdivisions (kernels) which are then summarized. The important or salient part of the kernel is all that is extracted at the end of this process of recursive summarization. The attention process for efficient information representation also follows the expectations of functional grammar and discourse analysis: meaning shifts depending on the level of aggregation. This practice is well known for exegetes of languages like Koine Greek, where an anchor clause (a clause that changes the focal point in a discourse) at the end of a long sentence may dramatically shift the meaning.

Attention furthers the goal of AI language use that surpasses the repetition of source data. Use of a paradigm is different from rote repetition, and AI is intended to express the paradigmatic. Training is focused on learning the proverbial paradigms and not just repeating the training corpus. Generating content which is not explicitly the training material and yet is coherent with the training material requires a resource efficient way to deal with abstraction of context, which is exactly what attention mechanisms provide.

In text generation, attention is critical to producing meaningful texts that humans recognize as natural language. AI systems will generate combinations and permutations of words which have not been previously observed but are selected based on the emerging context (staying coherent with its own prior generated text). The attention matrix transforms the semantic space used by the generating AI system so that the following text is selected based on the developing context. As

⁸ Tomas Mikolov, Kai Chen, Greg Corrado, and Jeffrey Dean, “*Efficient Estimation of Word Representations in Vector Space*,” arXiv [Cs.CL], 2013. arXiv. <http://arxiv.org/abs/1301.3781>.

a result, attention allows text to be contextual to a conversation and safeguards the coherence of a text. Attention further supports adapting the flow of the text based on external feedback from the conversation participant (prompting). Internal and external use of attention improves the readability of the generated content and provides a critical source of novelty, both of which are recognized as meaningful and natural language use.

Deployment of attention mechanisms parallels the grammarian's movement away from morphology and toward the sentence or the discourse unit as the carrier of meaning. Newer AI systems use alternating attention, which allows for more seamless movement and coordination between the local and global meaning of a text. The pragmatic result is greater possibility of novelty without incoherence in the generated text, and a greater ability to continue upon a novel use of language by dynamically updating the relative semantic relationships commensurate to the emerging context.

The novel use of concepts in a way that is recognized by the community – without being mere repetition of prior language used by the community – fulfills the expectations set forth by Dr. Hector for how theological concepts ideally are used.⁹ His description of concepts without correspondence theory describes a model of language which AI systems make reality. He is describing concept use from a theological perspective, but he is also indirectly describing what AI specialists will call *inferential semantics*.

Inferential semantics describes the use of language where the next word is not purely based on the distribution of words. Inferential semantics is built upon the use of embeddings, which provide a mathematical calculation of proximity between words and are derived from usage itself, and attention, which transforms proximity based on context and the interaction in the conversation and provides a shifting context to nuance the meaning contribution of every word sample within the training corpus.

Research into inferential semantics will test for advanced natural language skills. AI systems can understand anaphora (replacing a specific word with a substitute, such as the use of English pronouns) across large blocks of text and likewise employ an elliptical or passive writing style with a meaning that can be understood.¹⁰ Anaphora is the paradigm for Hector's model of theological concept: it is the behavioral situation and normative continuity of meaning which gives identity through a preserved chain of anaphora. His model of picking out that referent using multiple trajectories is a simplistic model implemented in a more significant manner in embeddings.

The inference performed by an attention mechanism is a “material rather than formal inference,” satisfying the Fregean idea of contextualizing a word in a sentence. AI attention has been shown to reflect the discursive flow of a text including external factors such as the diachronic change of meaning through time.¹¹ When translating between languages, AI systems do not map directly word to word but instead activate a different semantic space which serves as a “lingua franca” independent of either the source or target.¹² AI skills learned in one language can be translated to others or applied to a new corpus of learning. All told, recent research pushes the boundary of what AI can do with natural language to produce meaningful texts.

⁹ Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics*.

¹⁰ Researchers Yuzuki Arai and Sho Tsugawa have demonstrated that AI can properly use “concepts of substitutable expressions and anaphoric expressions.” Yuzuki Arai and Sho Tsugawa, “Do Large Language Models Defend Inferentialist Semantics? On the Logical Expressivism and Anti-Representationalism of LLMs,” arXiv [Cs.CL], 2024. 6, <http://arxiv.org/abs/2412.14501>

¹¹ Mohamed Taher Alrefaie, Fatty Salem, Nour Eldin Morsy, Nada Samir, and Mohamed Medhat Gaber. “Dynamics of Meaning through Time: Assessment of Large Language Models,” arXiv [Cs.CL], 2025. arXiv. <http://arxiv.org/abs/2501.05552>.

¹² Hongchuan Zeng, Senyu Han, Lu Chen, and Kai Yu, “Converging to a Lingua Franca: Evolution of Linguistic Regions and Semantics Alignment in Multilingual Large Language Models,” arXiv [Cs.CL], 2025. arXiv. <http://arxiv.org/abs/2410.11718>.

Modern AI systems have been designed to implement the natural language usage described by functional grammar and discourse analysis. In a sense, their procedures for generating text exploit our expectations of what contributes to meaningful and natural language use. AI systems use inferential semantics to surpass the expectations of distributional semantic theory¹³ and produce texts with a literary nature. AI systems are trained like the human student, who, based on paradigms, produces a novel text in a context. In less technical terms, AI systems should no longer be considered an information retrieval system which finds existing human texts; their implementation explicitly performs far more complicated procedures which mirror the theoretical ideal of how a natural language user creates literature. The literary nature of AI-generated texts include complicated linguistic skills: use of theological concepts, landing novel metaphors, and contextualizing the use of concepts/words across different horizons (within a text, across a conversation, and diachronically).¹⁴

This has been a cursory review of the ways that AI systems use language to produce meaningful texts. AI systems have implemented many of the ways functional grammar¹⁵ described natural language use, producing a result that appears meaningful without being mere reproduction. AI uses words based on their literary use, not route definition,¹⁶ and models the communicative context so that the whole composition is coherent. AI use of language maintains the tension between a normative use (which is consistent with prior use) and novel use (an ordering of words suitable to the context but not previously recorded).

Not every AI-generated text is equal, just as with every human text. However, the advancement of AI systems increases our exposure to texts which are recognized as meaningful and yet produced by AI. Much of the popular literature on AI has focused on the ethical concerns of using AI-generated content to influence and manipulate individuals or communities, attesting to the persuasive power of AI-generated content.¹⁷ In short, AI-generated texts are increasingly capable of convincing the reader that they are interacting with a human author, and the impacts have already raised concern.

II THE ASSUMED AUTHOR OF A MEANINGFUL TEXT

The next important premise is that human readers are inclined to think there was an intentional, and therefore implicitly human, author behind the anonymous¹⁸ but meaningful texts they encounter. Several factors mutually contribute to this movement from a meaningful text to an assumed human author.

One unavoidable factor is how natural language users approach all new communications (texts included). The charity principle¹⁹ in linguistics describes how the receiver of a communication will provisionally trust new content. Donald Davidson highlights two assumptions in the principle: “the

13 This theory posits that words that are related show up in close proximity. The theory models the next word of a sentence based on prior proximity. A system based on the distributional semantic theory would optimize for producing the same contexts already observed. It would fail to accommodate more complex discourses, or novel concepts like new metaphors. I hear many non-practitioners describe or expect AI systems to use the distributional semantic model, which is no longer correct. AI systems surpass the limits of what can be done purely by distributional semantics.

14 For a thorough review of recent peer-reviewed research into the capabilities of AI systems, please refer to my book *Can AI Proclaim Christ?* One example focusing on short story creation is the following: Ismayilzada, Mete, Claire Stevenson, and Lonneke van der Plas. ‘Evaluating Creative Short Story Generation in Humans and Large Language Models’. arXiv [Cs.CL], 2025. arXiv. <http://arxiv.org/abs/2411.02316>.

15 A theory of grammar which models the structure of language based on its pragmatic and social / cognitive use.

16 Literary use includes poetic, metaphorical, and non-literal use of language.

17 For one example, see Feng, K. J. Kevin, Quan Ze Chen, Inyoung Cheong, King Xia, and Amy X. Zhang. ‘Case Repositories: Towards Case-Based Reasoning for AI Alignment’. arXiv [Cs.AI], 2023. arXiv. <http://arxiv.org/abs/2311.10934>.

18 An anonymous text avoids trivial cases that are of little value. For example, if someone uses an AI service to generate a text, it is unreasonable to expect them to think this was produced by a human author. Anonymity does not help argue the case, but it helps avoid lower value cases.

19 Donald Davidson, *The Essential Davidson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 15, 116, 150, 163.

speaker is largely rational” and furthermore “most of [the author’s] environmentally directed beliefs are true.”²⁰ Our natural disposition toward a meaningful text is to assume a rational author making true claims. These expectations are unsettling and disillusioning when the author is in fact an AI system and not a human. There is nothing inherent to a meaningful text that requires a rational human author writing in an earnestly truthful manner, but this expectation is a pragmatic expedient for communication. Therefore, expecting a rational author is the default expectation across diverse languages and cultures.

A related and equally complicating factor is the divine design²¹ of humans as communicative agents. Societies and interpersonal interactions would be quite difficult if most of what we heard or read was not truthful. Our God-given design disposes us toward accepting and iterating on this provisional acceptance of what we hear and read as meant-to-be-true, an idea explored by the Reformed anthropologist Alvin Plantinga. We are disposed provisionally to expect that a text comes from a truthful author until sufficient disproofs have been found. The process describes our initial position of provisional trust, and then the iteratively corrective verification.

If we accept Plantinga’s model for warrant and verification, it raises concerns for how readers would deal with their first exposure to AI-generated meaningful texts. In this scenario, one’s personal historical experience of meaningful communication is exclusive to human authors. Until we have experienced a meaningful text which was produced by an AI system, we lack any disproofs which would argue against our warrant that every text is generated by a human author with an intention. Therefore, our God-given design will dispose us to expect human authors until we experience the disillusionment of an AI-generated meaningful text.

Our first exposure to meaningful texts or communication is in the context of human authors, and this sets the expectation that a meaningful text demands a human author. Much like a baby first encountering a mirror, we must have a personal experience before we will fully appreciate that not everything which looks like a face (or reads like a human text) is what it appears. Many books on interpretation include a passage to this extent, claiming that random marks left on the beach could never have meaning or authorial intention. Newer examples mention computers randomly generating strings of words. Now, the process of words being assembled by an AI system is procedurally rich, having been designed to implement the very processes which underly human natural language use. The results are no longer so easily dismissed as sub-human or sub-meaningful. The claim that only humans create meaningful texts (or more strongly, that all meaningful texts are produced by intentional humans) was once obvious because there was no counter data. The counter data is now available, and thus the assumptions are no longer above reproach.

A final factor is that, when the reader adopts a highly propositional posture toward interpretation, one excludes the data which might differentiate human from AI-generated texts. A highly propositional interpretation starts and ends with the internal evidence of the text itself. Even if the reader can reconstruct the historical situation of a text being written and/or performed, this style of interpretation is dismissive of moving from internal evidence to a historical reconstruction. Primacy is given to the internal evidence, or what the text says semantically, discursively, literally, and figuratively within the literary and then historical context. The reader relies heavily, if not exclusively, on the text’s literary nature, and thus interpretation is most influenced by the text’s nature and meaningfulness.

One of the most extreme and illuminating examples of associating the author to the

20 Davidson, *The Essential Davidson*, 15.

21 My use of the terms warrant and disproofs in this section comes from Plantinga’s use of the terms. A *warrant* forms the basis for holding something as true, and *disproofs* are data which contradict and could potentially overturn an understanding of what is true. See Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 14.

meaningfulness of the text is provided by the essay *Against Theory*.²² In this essay, the authors argue that there is an ontological identity relationship between authorial intention and the meaning of a text: “the meaning of a text is simply identical to the author’s intended meaning... to have one is already to have them both.”²³ The strong claim of an identity relationship means that there must be an intentional author if there is a meaningful text. It is fair to conclude that a reader with this position toward intention and meaning is expecting a human author behind a meaningful text and is neither expecting nor prepared for the disillusionment of an AI author.

Each of these factors contributes toward the problematic expectation that every meaningful text is produced by a human author. The nature of language makes it exceedingly difficult for us to communicate without assuming that the anonymous author is similar in key respects to ourselves: a rational, living, morally responsible, and intentional human. Our divinely provided nature as communicative beings disposes us toward ways of understanding and using truth claims. Our natural disposition toward truth in combination with our human social upbringing encourages the reader to expect a human author behind every meaningful text.

In summary, the growth of AI and our human social habits makes it harder for a reader to correctly determine if a text is human or AI-generated. Increasingly sophisticated texts are being produced by AI systems, which is making it increasingly difficult to determine the authorial nature based on the meaningfulness or the internal evidence of a text. Our socialization within human communities²⁴ means we each begin with a default expectation that meaningful texts are produced by intentional humans. This default expectation will persist until we have sufficient evidence of AI-generated meaningful texts, at which point we have experienced the disillusionment of expecting a human where instead there was an AI.

The situation already seems dire due to our dispositions as natural language users, and yet the situation gets worse. In addition to the factors mentioned above, our approaches to understanding texts (our hermeneutics) may further contribute to expecting a human author behind a meaningful text. These hermeneutic theories will also predicate various things about the inferred author, increasing the disappointment for the reader. In the next section I will consider this possibility by examining Vanhoozer’s *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*

III APPLICATION TO THE HERMENEUTICS OF VANHOOZER

The preceding argument will now be applied to Vanhoozer’s hermeneutic theory from his book *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* It is worthwhile to note in advance that the problems raised in the context of Vanhoozer will also find remedy within the wider context of Vanhoozer’s thought. The *hermeneutics of faith* can be taken as a synthesis of Vanhoozer’s hermeneutics with a generalized version of his own ethical demands for the community of faith.

Taken alone, Vanhoozer’s hermeneutic will prove to be problematic for the disillusionment described above. My proposed remedy is to extend his use of authorial intent by anchoring and pre-emptively qualifying his process within the authentication that comes from lived experience. The lived experience of the individual author or authorial interpretive community provides a new source of public data to be weighed in consideration of the truth claims of the text. As external to the text, it provides a pre-cognitive criterion that can importantly be applied prior to the reading itself.

Vanhoozer argues for the concept of the individual and corporate life of the community being one of the sources of authentication for their truth claims. My recommendation is thus shared by Vanhoozer in a different context, where he writes of the role and importance of the

22 Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, “Against Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 723–42.

23 Knapp and Michaels, “Against Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 723–42.

24 The default or normal human reader can be expected to have been raised in a family/community, although not all human readers will have this experience.

community of faith living out the gospel. His ethical/ecumenical recommendations from *Faith Speaking Understanding* ought to find a new application within his hermeneutics. What I propose as a problem with Vanhoozer's hermeneutics encourages a wider reading of Vanhoozer so that his ethical ideas can be synthesized with his hermeneutics.

Returning to the problematic aspects of his hermeneutic, the argument thus far has substantiated that advancements in AI are producing texts which are recognized by human readers as meaningful. Textual meaningfulness inclines the default reader to expect a human author. The expectation of a human author is consistent with the public data available to the reader (primarily the text itself) and is consistent with prior historical-social experience of meaningful communication exclusively being the product of intentional humans. The expectation of a human author is increasingly likely to be erroneous, given AI can satisfy the evidence being used to infer a human author. As a result of this misconception, all expectations the reader places on the author (whether limited to this being a human author or extended to predicate moral and rational qualities to the author) are expectations which will now reasonably lead to disillusionment upon realizing the author was in fact an AI.

Vanhoozer's hermeneutic theory builds on the interpretive theory of Hirsch²⁵ and the reformed anthropology of Plantinga. He uses Augustine to motivate a moral obligation between the reader and the author,²⁶ which he extends to describe a communion and fellowship between the author and reader. He adopts the model of locution, illocution, and perlocution²⁷ to describe the text as an action itself. The communicative action, which is the text, connects the author to the reader in an embodied relationship that Vanhoozer describes as a real fellowship. The concept of fellowship is important for a piece of supporting evidence called in by Vanhoozer. He explicitly draws the connection between his thesis ("works mediate their author's intentions") and the "Reformed tradition's solution to the problem of the mode of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper."²⁸ The embodiment of the text mediates the physical presence and embodiment of the author in the communicative experience of the reader and is even described by Vanhoozer as analogous to the sacramental experience of the eucharist.

Vanhoozer's goal is to motivate a positive and receptive attitude toward the text. He wants to oppose the post-modern skepticism that doubts we can find meaning or intention within any text. Vanhoozer tries to dismiss robustly Derrida and his ilk by recourse to thinkers like Searle and Hirsch. Though a thoroughly researched and outlined argument, Vanhoozer effectively argues for a moral obligation "essentially to receive [the author's] communication, not to revise it [during interpretation]."²⁹ His whole argument of moral obligation rests on the consistent assumption of an intentional human author behind the communication act. To create a comprehensive defense against post-modern deconstructionism, he accepts an initially uncritical³⁰ attitude toward the text. Therefore, all the positive things Vanhoozer has to say about the author and the moral obligations he imposes on the reader become expectations that fuel a greater disillusionment in the age of AI.

Vanhoozer's moral hermeneutics exacerbates the potential disillusionment caused by AI

25 The section referenced below summarizes Hirsch's goals that Vanhoozer approves and adopts. He also states how Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation* will be used as a guide for his system. Vanhoozer reflects a consistent agreement with Hirsch; Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 76-77.

26 Vanhoozer approves of Augustine's hermeneutic, which "encourages readers to approach texts... in the expectation that they contain something valuable and true." Vanhoozer, "Meaning," 33.

27 *Locution* is the speaking/word, *illocution* is the direct effect of the speaking/word (such as ordering someone to do something), and *perlocution* is the indirect result affected in or by those who receive the locution (such as influencing someone to behave in a future way differently).

28 Vanhoozer, "Meaning," 240.

29 Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 202.

30 We must remember that his opposition is against a critical and skeptical attitude toward the text. Preconditions can be seen as a form of skepticism. My argument is that these critical questions help to protect the desired positive and optimistic attitude toward the text from becoming most problematic.

generating meaningful texts that are assumed to come from human authors. If one follows Vanhoozer's model, then the AI author (which one thought was a human) was also someone to be respected, experienced, and communed with in an embodied manner, and even seen as "good." Worse yet, the experience of the present-in-absence author is seen as parallel to the presence of Christ in the eucharist. Disillusionment in authors now becomes a potential contagion leading to disillusionment in the presence of Christ. Vanhoozer's noble project was motivated by the desire to combat skepticism but has turned into a potential fuel for a new type and age of skepticism. He wanted to avoid relativism, where the text loses its relationship to the author. His very reasonable answer was to suggest we cannot remove the author from the text, and that the intentions of the author are found in the text itself. However, this means that if we find intentions, we expect an intentional author who uses natural language in the same way we do: as a rational, living, morally responsible, and intentional human. When these elevated expectations for the author are uncritically projected onto unworthy authors, the eventual result may be a worse skepticism. Every time our assumption about the humanity of an author proves to be wrong (we realize a moving poem or a convincing argument was written by an AI), it becomes another data point suggesting we should doubt the humanity of the next author. Repeated disillusionment can be devastating for the reader. Vanhoozer wanted an experience of reading which avoided skepticism of the author, but following his hermeneutical model may now lead to extreme and persistent skepticism. My goal is to use Vanhoozer's own thinking to help avoid that outcome.

IV – A HERMENEUTICS OF FAITH

The case has been presented that the nature of the author (AI or human) is increasingly hard to be certain about when encountering a semi-anonymous text.³¹ AI systems can generate text which is recognized as meaningful. Meaningful texts are approached as produced by human authors. Our hermeneutics echo our natural design, linguistic compulsions, and socialized experience to expect every meaningful text was produced by an intentional human. Vanhoozer's hermeneutic model, which tried to defend against relativism by connecting authorial intention to the text's meaning, placed unconditional moral obligations toward the author on the reader. The author not only had something to say truthfully, but the text created a personal relationship and expected certain moral attitudes and expectations of the author. The modern situation shatters the once safe and strict correspondence between meaningful texts and intentional authors. The likely result is disillusionment as authors are given privileged status and respect, only to be revealed to have been AI all along.

The argument motivates the desire to redeem authorial intention through an expanded ability to differentiate between AI and human authors. We would need a data source which is outside of the text, and which is both public/observable. Ideally, access to this data can happen as a pre-literary moment, so the reader can determine how much authentication there is for a text before reading. In the process of reading, we are liable to create and experience disillusionment if we are not aware beforehand of how much openness and confidence in the truth claims of the text is justified for the reader. The unconditional moral obligations of Vanhoozer need conditions, which I call the hermeneutic of faith.

Vanhoozer's ecumenical and ethical work in *Faith Speaking Understanding* will be used to help elucidate the conditions prior to imposing moral obligations on the reader. His argument therein is that the community of faith ought to live out the gospel. We are imitators of Christ, and the performance of this faith is how we authentically become Christlike. The propositional claims of the community only are meaningful as far as they are embodied in the living commitments of the community. In a concrete example, proclaiming the forgiveness of sins by God is authenticated

31 A text where there is little to no direct information about the author is semi-anonymous. A text becomes less anonymous the more direct personal proof we have about the authorship.

when we behave like those who have been forgiven by God. Our propositions to this effect have a more authentic claim because the authors are living out these claims in their own lives and community. In a double manner, not only are they living out these commitments, but they are also living proof that these commitments can be enabled by the work of the Holy Spirit.

The hermeneutic of faith combines an external source of authentication (the lived reality of the author/author's community) with the internal search for meaning within a text. The same hermeneutical approaches of Vanhoozer toward meaning in the text can be sustained. The moral obligations and the fellowship through the presence-in-absence³² of the text are preserved. What is added is that these conclusions are now safeguarded by this conditional evaluation, discerning when it is appropriate to take such a stance toward the text.

There ought to be a lived commitment of authors to their texts before we seek meaningful truth claims from a truthful author in the text. If authors do not live the truth claims of their texts, or this cannot be substantiated, then the texts themselves begin with a reduced authoritative status. Accordingly, each author is granted fewer *unconditional* expectations. The experience of the text may still substantiate a deep respect for the anonymous author. Respect can still be earned, and the propositional content may be extremely valuable. However, respect for the author is no longer an unconditional presumption or obligation. The hermeneutic of faith means the reader ought to *test the lived commitment of the individual/community prior to the hermeneutic work*, and it protects proactively against the most severe disillusionment of readers toward authors. This investigation removes some of the anonymity of the author, and allows the reader a more assured position before engaging in interpreting and being influenced by the text. My hope is that this hermeneutic of faith will help avoid and mitigate a potential source of grave disillusionment toward authors by synthesizing the ecumenical and ethical ideal provided by Vanhoozer with his moral hermeneutic.

For communication acts expressing Christian truths, the hermeneutic of truth asks the following pre-literary question: is the performance (text, preaching, proclamation) situated within a life which is committed to and publicly experiencing the suffering of Christ? Does the text itself reflect an intention consistent with the stated purpose in communicating? Is the performance itself a lived participation in the life of Christ, filling up what is lacking in His sufferings for the community of faith? It should be clear that the reader's consideration is immediately widened beyond the text, and these questions are asked before our potentially tragic and disillusioning encounter with the text. Before our linguistic nature starts expecting human authors with certain expected attributes, the reader ought to ask if the performance of this linguistic experience is sufficiently authorized by the public lived experience of the author. The text may still be valuable or useful, but it is approached critically instead of uncritically.

Looking to the lived authentication of a text will be a benefit to the role of authorial intention in the search for meaning. The expanded aperture provides a greater range of data to leverage when seeking a text's meaning. However, it is critically important to clarify that this is neither a justification nor a blind encouragement for reconstructing the private details of the author's lived reality. Historical problems are always present, and a reconstruction which does not have a resource to real data is more likely to reflect our own biases and our own inability to reason about the genius of texts which are discordant with the monotonous repeatability expected by history. Instead of reconstruction and projection, the better answer is humbly to accept our inability to answer the question about the authentication of the text through lived experience. When we lack an answer to how a linguistic performance is situated within the suffering faith of the performer, we ought to be reserved in our assertions about the authorial intention. When we have such access, we have a greater sense of the meaning involved.

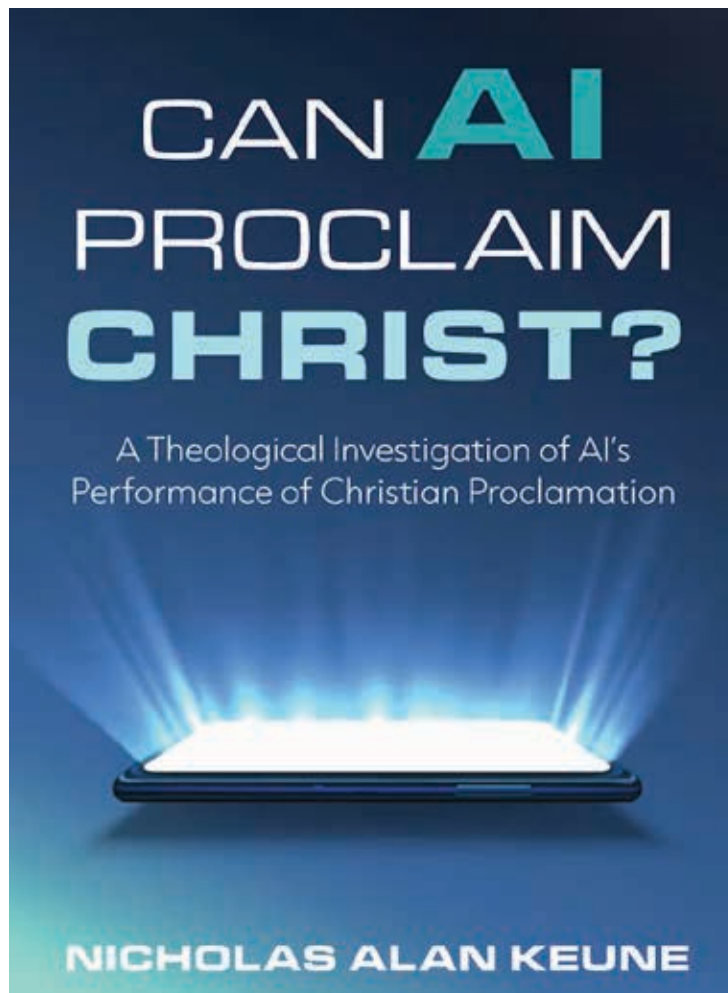
32 *Presence-in-absence* describes how an author is virtually present in the meaning being conveyed by a text. What would have been said face to face is instead communicated through textual transmission, and in reading the text, it is as if the author is present and communicating with the reader.

V SUMMARY

In summary, the hermeneutic of faith seeks to protect our trust and engagement with the text. When we are preemptively discerning in our attitude toward a text, we will preserve our trust in authors and our meaningful engagement with the meanings posed by an author's intentions. The uncertainty posed by AI systems and the rise of their linguistic skills may in the grand scheme of history be appreciated as another step-change in the hermeneutic tradition.

In the hermeneutic of faith, the object of intention is not limited to the meaning in the text but is validated by the lived truth of the authors and their community. The proposed preemptive authentication echoes the wise claims of the apostle Paul: "you yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all" (2 Cor. 3:3 ESV). Authorization of the text comes from a lived commitment that authenticates what it says, a criterion which effectively differentiates between not only AI and human, but between authentic and inauthentic texts by humans.

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God's Mercy and the Mission of the Church to the Muslims¹

SAIDEH HERAVI-BONAB

I am a convert to Christianity from Islam. I am going to give my family's testimony to demonstrate God's mercy that brought us to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. I will conclude with an appendix comparing Islam and Christianity with suggestions on how to extend God's mercy to Muslims. I am the youngest of six children, growing up in an Islamic family to amazing parents. My father was a successful entrepreneur and yet a wonderful, honest, spiritual man who lived his life with integrity and honesty. He believed that God had blessed him with a beautiful wife and family and helped him prosper in so many ways. Faith, morals, and values were instilled in all of us and to have compassion and faith became part of my life. My compassion for the homeless started at a very young age. I did not comprehend that someone could live a good life in a beautiful home and someone else could sleep in poverty in the street. My parents would help out with huge bags of rice, meat, and money as part of their humanity and belief that they had to help others in need. Because they believed in God, it was part of their conviction to help others as much as they could.

The first tragedy of my life happened when I was only fourteen years old when I lost my beautiful mother tragically in a car accident. Someone was intoxicated and hit her and she passed away after five days of being in a coma. After a few months my father forgave the driver. I learned about kindness and forgiveness from him, but we all questioned him: "Papa, why did you forgive him?" My father said "He had five kids!" In my father's room, the scent of my mother's perfume remained present. I witnessed how my father's faith in a loving God stayed strong, worshiping God in lament for my mother and still remaining faithful to God as loving and kind. My father had many Christlike attributes. As a very good Muslim, he believed that his good deeds must outweigh his bad deeds on the scale of life to enter the kingdom of heaven (Surah Al-Araf, verses 8-9).²

At seventeen, I finished high school and moved to Italy to be with my brother, respecting my father's wishes. I mastered the Italian language and literature, as my father advised me to do. I wanted to study science, but Italy was constantly on strike every week and in turmoil. It was not appealing. I could not return home and moved to Boston, Massachusetts. The revolution in Iran had already started and The Shah of Iran had left. Iran was in chaos and turmoil. So many wealthy, well-educated doctors, and prominent people left the country since they did not want to go back to the ancient Islamic world and radical religion with its fundamentalist focus. Money was coming with difficulty as Islamic fundamentalists became powerful and controlled people's wealth and belongings. I was in my second year in college studying science when I heard that my beloved and only surviving parent that I loved so much had passed away. As my father died, my sisters told me that he kept saying my name. This put me in severe depression. I had to stop school and work sixty hours per week to sustain myself. Although my father left me a hefty trust fund in Iran, I have not received anything to this day. Living on noodles and fast food restaurants and going from one job to another jeopardized my health and gave me intestinal issues. I had to become careful with my diet. Life was getting challenging and difficult to survive and I became poor and bitter. I was no longer that privileged girl living in that beautiful mansion with my loving parents and siblings. Life was tough and unbearable.

My sister in France had just finished her doctorate degree and was feeling postpartum depression with the birth of her second child. Ending her thesis, she decided to come and stay with

1 This paper is an adaptation of a Theology Survey paper for Dr. William David Spencer Oct 9, 2024. A short version of Saideh's testimony is available at *Applying Biblical Truths Today*, June 2025.

2 "The weighing on that Day will be just. As for those whose scale will be heavy 'with good deeds', 'only' they will be successful." Surah Araf 8-9. Quran, <https://Quran.com/al-araf/8-9>. All references to the Quran come from this site, the official Ulthmanic text, and an English translation by Mustafa Khatiab.

me which put more burden and responsibility on my shoulders. She and her children were great company and they eliminated my depression. Because she was cooking all the time, my illness went into remission and I was able to work a lot. Every day of my life, I believed and copied my loving parents, who instilled the values of generosity in me. I helped my sister and her kids for almost two years. I took them finally to Montreal as my brother-in-law, like my sister in Montreal, was a scientist. His visa was rejected three times before he received one and finally we had a great reunion in Montreal.

On a rainy day as I was driving to deliver gifts and toys, I prayed to God, saying, "God, please I am alone again, please bring my soulmate." My prayers were answered and my husband, a scientist and college professor, came, for the Persian New Year to visit his cousins in Montreal and met me at my sister's house. We became engaged in two days and were married in two months. Our marriage lasted for twenty-three and a half years, during which we moved back to Boston, while he started working as a medical physicist at Massachusetts General Hospital and later on became a radiologist. He was very successful. This amazing man was a beautiful, kind soul with an amazing heart as he believed in helping others. He helped many students go to college. Our primary mission was to help others because we believed in a God who wanted us to do kind actions. Good Muslims believe that Allah weighs good deeds and bad deeds on a scale.

We had a miscarriage with our son Andreas but the good Lord blessed us later with a beautiful daughter. I dreamt of my father and he told me to be happy. Our beautiful precious daughter was born a year later. Even though she was only one month old, we took her on many trips and conferences. Life seemed perfect. Even my older sister commented to my sisters about me. "Look at her: no mother and no father, but she is so blessed and happy because she believes with her whole heart in the God of Islam."

When my daughter turned twelve, my husband suddenly got sick and ended up in the same hospital that he had worked in for so long. While he was in Massachusetts General Hospital, Jesus, the true God of the universe, the Lord of lords and King of kings, revealed himself to my husband and said: "YOU ARE FREE!" After I dropped my daughter off at school, I went to see my husband in the hospital. He confessed to me, our pastor, and seven other people, that he was in love with Jesus. My husband said to me, "let me go!" "How?" I asked. "You just had an encounter with Jesus, why do you want to leave us and go?" When my beloved husband and my true love died, I became heart broken and fearful of the unknown. I did not know how to survive in a land with no family. Many of my friends and even family left the United States. Life became more difficult. The life for a single Mom, a widow, was more difficult. Many were frankly fearful that I might be needing them for financial purposes. My husband, bless his soul, had put me in nursing school and after he passed into eternity, I was able to go back to work as a nurse. I became the favorite of many directors and supervisors who would ask for me to do visiting nursing. My Lord responded to all of my prayers and provided. I was juggling between my work, my family, and our mourning at the same time. After asking, "why Lord, why and why? I thought you loved us and what is it that you want from me," he answered, "I want you to work for me." In my pain, sorrow, and lament, I found the true and the only God of heaven, Jesus Christ. I received him as my Lord and Savior. There is no one like him. After I became a Christian, I received Jesus' forgiveness for my sins because of Jesus' redemptive sacrifice on the cross at Calvary (Isa 53:5). Now Jesus lives inside my heart and my good deeds spring from the power of the Holy Spirit residing in me (Gal 2:20). As that passion for Jesus intensified in me, the fear of the unknown disappeared, I kept saying "yes" to my Lord Jesus. As I said yes to Jesus, my life became devoted to him and he became my true love. As I trusted in him, my numerous prayers were answered. I have so many testimonies of God's mercy, faithfulness, and compassion and how he delivered us over and over again.

Flying arrows of the enemies were around me as I said yes to work for Jesus. Once I said "yes" to my true God, and, yes to my calling, the journey became more difficult, but I rebuked the

Enemy in his glorious name. The year that Covid happened, I had already said yes to God and wanted to come to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary to become educated in ministry and theology. There, on the Boston Campus, I saw a glimpse of heaven with the beautiful, kind people around me and amazing professors with their wealth of knowledge. In the summer of 2024, I took a class entitled Christian Approach to Islam. The first book I read was *My Neighbor's Faith: Islam Explained for Christians* by Dr. John Alembillah Azumah. He spoke bluntly of Islamic faith without any bias and judgment. That resonated with me as well. Islam is still the faith of so many of my family and relatives. Azumah said that, in a survey of Muslims, the Lord Jesus has appeared to many Muslims whether in their dreams or as an encounter. Suddenly, I jumped with joy as I was crying and dancing at the same time that my husband was not the only one who had an encounter with Jesus. Dr. Azumah in *My Neighbor's Faith* said that the living true God of heaven is pouring his Spirit on so many and bringing people into his kingdom from every diaspora for his glory. Over six hundred others are documented to have had direct encounters and visions with Jesus.³

Truly I believe that God looks at the hearts of humans and their compassion for others. In 1 Samuel 16:7, the Lord said to Samuel: "Do not consider his appearance or his height,..the Lord looks at the heart."⁴ This beautiful and holy God has so many glorious attributes that are part of his glory that are revealed in the authoritative book of the Bible, which is God-breathed.

As my intimacy and fellowship grew with the God of heaven, I could hear and feel the Holy Spirit talking to me and guiding me through my path. When my days started as early as 4:30 to 5:00 a.m. in the morning, I would pray and I would know that God was listening and smiling as I was preparing my breakfast. I would sing a love song to God or sing a song that I made up for him with my own rhythm. Two years ago, I woke up at 4:30 in the morning and the good Lord told me to call up my brother-in-law! He lived in the north by the Caspian Sea. He was a prominent and successful dentist with a villa and five homes. He had worked for more than forty-five years and built a villa which was literally a mansion, five minutes away from the ocean. I said to the Lord, "Can I take a shower and then call him?" But, the Lord kept telling me to call "now!" As always, I listened to my Lord and I called my brother-in-law and I said, "You have been like a brother to me and I wanted to tell you that my lord is the Lord Jesus and he is the true God of the whole universe. Hopefully you can have the same eternity as many of us will." After thirty minutes, I hung up because I needed to go to work and I heard from my other sister that I was mocked. However, prior to his passing, my brother-in-law told my sister, his wife, that I was right about Jesus.

We are living in a dark, unprecedented time when demons and demonic activities are present around us and are ready to devour God's children.

Once I worshiped within Islam, a belief system filled with errors and killing. Mohammed's Islamic religion that I was taught is not a relationship between the Creator and the creation. In this religion nothing is peaceful. Unable to be exposed to orthodox Christians but mainly being surrounded by heretical ones, Mohammed was misinformed and thereby misled. He reacted against this and rejected Jesus, whom he would have found in the documents written by those who actually knew Jesus and recorded his actual revelations about himself. Mohammed centered on a monotheistic view of God as did Judaism and Christianity, but he saw God only as a monad and missed out on Jesus' actual revelations which fulfill the Jewish prophecies in passages like Isaiah (e.g., 7:14). Further, he missed the Holy Spirit in Genesis and the Word of God also comprising the Godhead. He rejected the Three in One trinitarian view of God and adopted a view of God as solely a warrior God which is not God's only image in the Bible. As a result, Islam introduced itself as a religion propelled by killing and oppression, and forcing others to submit or to die, as we still see today in places like Sudan and Nigeria.

³ John Azumah Alembillah and Kwame Bediako, *My Neighbor's Faith: Islam Explained for Christians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 128.

⁴ All Bible references are from the NIV unless otherwise cited.

True submission is obedience to the glorious Lord Jesus who is the Prince of peace, joy, and love. Because he is holy, we too must be holy. Muhammed wrote the Quran, which contains 114 *surahs* (an Arabic word for a chapter of the Islamic holy book). In it, the Arian Jesus⁵ is a holy man, prophet, and teacher, not the Son of God and Second Person of the Trinity. Our Lord Jesus walked on water, healed the lame, blind, and deaf, fed 5,000 with two loaves of bread and two fish, converted water into wine and walked the streets of Galilee and healed so many.

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty” (Isa 6:3). Mohammed was a great warrior who was mortal but not a holy man. Our sinless divine spiritual being, the Lord of the lords and King of the kings Jesus, has so many beautiful attributes. For instance, the Lord is the true and living God who controls nature (Jer 10:10). The Lord Jesus said himself that “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). God’s love is revealed in the Second Person of the Trinity. Jesus is a transcendent presence.

Now that I am a Christian, I believe that my calling and my mission as a chosen servant of the Lord Jesus is to proclaim the good news to everyone, Jews or Gentiles, and that God’s mercy, compassion, and salvation are for everyone as he pours the rain on the just and the unjust. I see his hand at work in everything.

For example, after the passing of my beloved husband, I drove to Montreal. The trees were covering some signs. I was crying underneath my glasses and, suddenly, I heard a voice in my right ear saying “DEER!” I looked at my daughter as she was quietly on her phone. I slowed down and I saw five deer including a mom and dad with their beautiful baby deer, who were crossing the road. I completely stopped and praised the Lord for taking care of us and them and that none of us had to die. Every time I have prayed, the Lord has answered my numerous prayers and has been so faithful. His mercy is in abundance. God is good and merciful. He is a God of unity and justice, and welcomes everyone who wants to get to know him.

Zechariah 7:9-10 says: “This is what the Lord Almighty said, “Administer true justice, show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigners or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.” God is a compassionate God and pours his mercy and love over everyone. He watches over the widows, orphans, poor, and foreigners including Muslims.

A few years ago, I was asked to go to a school named the City on the Hill to do the school nursing for a few days there. Upon arriving to that area during the heavy traffic the good Lord told me that I could discuss homelessness around there, as one of my favorite scriptures is Matthew 25:35-36, “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink...I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me.” These are the beautiful attributes of our glorious God that we need to imitate. The Lord Jesus will notice the action of those who have done an act of kindness and compassion, of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and extending hospitality, including to Muslims.

Every year at the beginning of the new year from the fifth of January until the twenty-sixth, I fast for twenty-one days and I spend lots of quality time with my glorious Lord. I don’t watch any television except the news and I eat lots of plant-based foods and fish and no dairy either and after that fasting is over, I feel amazing. I feel the blessings of the Lord are pouring on me and my family and I believe in the power of his glory over our lives as he has provided and blessed us in so many ways.

Once, someone called me and was in severe stress and was crying. In order to calm her, I said, “I will pray and fast for you for two days.” It was on a Wednesday and I am usually off on Wednesdays, so I prayed for her and fasted for two days. As I was reading my Bible, suddenly I fell

⁵ Arianism (Koine Greek: Ἀρειανισμός, *Areianismós*) is a Christological doctrine that rejects the traditional notion of the Trinity, teaching that Jesus was created by God and is therefore distinct from God. It is named after its proponent Arius (c.256–336) and is regarded as heretical by most modern mainstream branches of Christianity. Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arianism>.

asleep, then I saw my husband come to me and say to me, “I love you and I love your ministry and I love what you are doing.” I woke up and I was so joyful. The person’s stress went away and her problem was resolved. Once we trust God and go to him with fasting and praying, he knows that we are being persistent and he answers our prayers (e.g., Luke 18:1-8).

On Oct 2, 2024 Helen Regan at CNN reported that Iran launched about 200 ballistic missiles at Israeli military targets, attacking them as an act of revenge, as this is an attitude of Islamic faith: Eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.⁶

Ever since Ayatollah Ali Khamenei came, he brought ISIS and Hezbollah causing division and took away so many innocent lives in the name of Jihad. Islam is a religion that is devoid of the love, peace, and joy of the true living God. Every part of the Islamic religion has been filled with chaos, war, turmoil, and unforgiveness.

Our Lord Christ is the God of love, peace, justice, unity, and forgiveness. He is the prince of peace and joy, who encourages all of us to live in love with each other by helping and serving. As a human being, a servant of the Lord, and a nurse, I want to treat everyone with respect and dignity regardless of race, age, and color and proclaim the good news of Jesus to many souls until the day that I die. Jesus is the Lord of the lords and King of the kings. When I go to be with him some day, I would like to hear “job well done by my good and faithful servant.”

In conclusion, I was open to the good news of the Gospel and received Jesus as Lord and Savior. I am grateful that Jesus died to save me by God’s grace. God’s mercy and the mission of the church to the Muslims is personal to me as a Christian convert from Islam. My husband was a very godly Muslim who had an encounter with Jesus before he died and Jesus told him that he was free. It is important for Christians to show God’s mercy to Muslims to bring them to Jesus in these critical moments in world history.

APPENDIX: SUGGESTIONS FOR SHARING THE GOOD NEWS WITH MUSLIMS

To outreach successfully to a believing Muslim, Christians must understand the theological differences between the Muslim and Christian Jesus. I have included a comparison of Islamic doctrine and Christian doctrine in this appendix so that Christians will outreach effectively to Muslims.

Muslims define Jesus as a fully human, prophet, teacher, and holy man. The Islamic Jesus was not the Son of God who always exists and is distinct from God the Father based on Islamic interpretation of John 14:28. John 14:28 reads: “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.” Muslims will ask: “How can Jesus be equal to God if here he states, “the Father is greater than I?”

Islam rejects the Bible’s revelation and thus the Nicene Christian belief in Jesus as the Son of God and the Second Person of the Trinity. Surah 19:34-36 explains: “That is Jesus, son of Mary. ‘And this is’ a word of truth, about which they dispute. It is not for Allah to take a son! Glory be to Him. When He decrees a matter, He simply tells it, “Be!” And it is! ‘Jesus also declared, “Surely Allah is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him ‘alone’. This is the Straight Path” (Quran). Fred Donner notes: “The amir’al mu aminin (commander or leader of the faithful), the ruling circle of Islam turned against the Nicene Christian doctrines of the Trinity, Jesus as God’s son, and the divinity and resurrection of Jesus. The transmission of the hadith defined Mohammed’s prophecy and apostleship and the emphasis on the Quran’s status as far above the earlier revelations of the *tawrat* (Torah) and the *injl* (Gospels).”⁷

⁶ “Eye for an eye and tooth for tooth.” This verse is found in Exodus 21:24 referring to serious injuries. It is also found in Surah 5:45 of the Quran: <https://Quran.com/>. Helen Regan, “How Might Israel Respond to Iran’s Missile Barrage? Here’s what we know,” <https://www.cnn.com/2024/10/02/middleeast/iran-missile-attack-israel-explainer-intl-hnk/index.html>.

⁷ Fred Donner, *Muhammed and the Believers: The Origins of Islam* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2012), 211.

The Islamic Doctrine of Atonement contrasts with the Christian doctrine of atonement. Surah 4:157-158 denies the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus: and for boasting, “We killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of Allah.” But they neither killed nor crucified him—it was only made to appear so. Even those who argue for this ‘crucifixion’ are in doubt. They have no knowledge whatsoever—only making assumptions. They certainly did not kill him. Rather, Allah raised him up to Himself. And Allah is Almighty, All-Wise” (Quran).

Islamic believers deny the redemptive work of Jesus. The Prophet Muhammad instructed: “Have *taqwa* (fear) of Allah wherever you may be, and follow up a bad deed with a good deed which will wipe it out, and behave well towards the people (At-Tirmidhi).⁸ This *hadith* refers to good deeds erasing the bad deeds. Muslims believe that humans make mistakes and commit bad deeds and can repent with sincerity and hope in God’s forgiveness through repentance and making good deeds.”⁹

In Islamic soteriology, Muslims work their way into heaven. Surah 4: 103 explains how ritual replaces Jesus’ redemptive work for the Moslem: “When the prayers are over, remember Allah—whether you are standing, sitting, or lying down. But when you are secure, establish regular prayers. Indeed, performing prayers is a duty on the believers at the appointed times” (Quran).

Surah 2: 185 adds: “Ramaḍân is the month in which the Quran was revealed as a guide for humanity with clear proofs of guidance and the decisive authority. So whoever is present this month, let them fast. But whoever is ill or on a journey, then ‘let them fast’ an equal number of days after Ramaḍân. Allah intends ease for you, not hardship, so that you may complete the prescribed period and proclaim the greatness of Allah for guiding you, and perhaps you will be grateful” (Quran).

The prayer requirements of the Sharia (Muslim Law) are complete to the last detail, telling the worshiper when he must say his prayers, how he must purify himself, and the postures he must adopt. Muslims are saved by repeated prescribed Arabic prayers facing the city of Mecca. Any slip or variation invalidates the whole prayer. In the month of Ramadan, Muslims are forbidden to eat, drink, smoke, or indulge in sex from early morning until about 15 minutes after sunset as a method of purification and atonement.

The same sort of legislation surrounds each religious duty: fasting, pilgrimage, giving alms, and waging Holy War. Sura 5:6 decrees:

O believers! When you rise up for prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, wipe your heads, and wash your feet to the ankles. And if you are in a state of “full” impurity, then take a full bath. But if you are ill, on a journey, or have relieved yourselves, or have been intimate with your wives and cannot find water, then purify yourselves with clean earth by wiping your faces and hands. It is not Allah’s Will to burden you, but to purify you and complete His favour upon you, so perhaps you will be grateful (Quran).

The pious Muslim is constantly performing deeds, to work out his salvation on this earth. He saves for a lifetime to make the Mecca pilgrimage. Sura 22:27-29 demands:

Call all people to the pilgrimage. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel from every distant path, so they may obtain the benefits “in store” for them, and pronounce the Name of Allah on appointed days over the sacrificial animals He has provided for them. So eat from their meat and feed the desperately poor. Then let them groom themselves, fulfil their vows, and circle the Ancient House (Quran).

8 Hadith 18: 40, Sunnah.com <https://sunnah.com/nawawi40:18>.

9 “The weighing on that Day will be just. As for those whose scale will be heavy ‘with good deeds’, ‘only’ they will be successful.” Surah Araf 8-9. Quran, <https://Quran.com/al-araf/8-9>.

The Muslim should give money to help erect a mosque, faithfully read the Quran, and pray Arabic prayers.¹⁰

The Quran completely rejects the Nicene doctrine of Jesus' atonement on that basis. Sura 54:47 maintains that hellfire and damnation await the unrepentant unbeliever: "Indeed, the wicked are entrenched in misguidance, and are bound for blazes" (Quran).

Militant Islam is an extreme manifestation of the Muslim process of working out salvation. In ISIS video beheadings, the black flag of Islam is raised above fallen infidels as a reminder to all Muslims that Islam is to be raised up and nothing is elevated above it, according to Surah 4:95:

Those believers who stay at home—except those with valid excuse are not equal to those who strive in the cause of Allah with their wealth and their lives. Allah has elevated in rank those who strive with their wealth and their lives above those who stay behind with valid excuses. Allah has promised each a fine reward, but those who strive will receive a far better reward than others (Quran).

The Islamic State not only decapitates but mutilates and mocks infidel corpses because in the context of Surah 9:14-15: "So fight them and Allah will punish them at your hands, put them to shame, help you overcome them, and soothe the hearts of the believers removing rage from their hearts. And Allah pardons whoever He wills. For Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise" (Quran).

An Islamic *hadith* gives Muhammed's anecdote of an account concerning the slaughter of a pagan Arab chieftain named Amr bin Hisham, originally known as Abus Hakim (father of wisdom) until Muhammed dubbed him Abu Jahi (father of stupidity) for his staunch opposition to Islam. Amr was mortally wounded by a new convert to Islam during the Battle of Badr. Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud, a close companion of Muhammed, saw the infidel chieftain collapsed on the ground. So he went to him and started abusing him. Among other things, Abdullah grabbed and pulled Amr's beard and stood in triumph on the dying man's chest.¹¹

As a result Muslims are taught the historical significance of Surah 9:14-15: wherein the Quran mandates violence against infidels to heal the hearts of the believers.

In contrast, the Christian Jesus Christ, being the Son of God, was the sinless sacrifice for humanity, as is stated in Ephesians 1:7 ("In him we have redemption through his blood"), John 1:14 ("The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us"), and Acts 20:28 ("the church of God, which he bought with his own blood"). According to The Nicene Creed, Jesus for us humans and for our salvation came down and was made incarnate becoming fully human. Fred Donner in his work, *Muhammad and the Believers*, states: "The Nicene Creed identified God's disposition to communicate his love. As the second Adam, Jesus' shed blood on Calvary was the perfection of inter-trinitarian love restoring humankind's relationship with the Father."¹²

Billy Graham's website "How Can You Share the Gospel with Muslims," suggests Christians should reach out to Muslims using these additional guidelines:

Be a friend. The Muslim culture places a high value on friendships, but many Muslims have not had the opportunity to develop a close friendship with a Christian. One way to develop a friendship in a way they will appreciate is to invite them to your home. They place a high value on hospitality—if you visited the home of a Muslim friend, you would not leave without being offered something to drink, no matter how short the visit. Show them the same care and hospitality and be sure and ask beforehand about any dietary restrictions (Matt 25:35-36, 40).

A Muslim's religion is inseparably tied to their family and culture, so be sensitive to the fact that if they reject Islam, their family and culture will probably reject them very harshly. This means

10 Jeanne DeFazio, "Islam versus Christianity," unpublished paper, 2010.

11 Amr Bin Hisham, Wikipedia:https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amr_ibn_Hisham

12 Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 249.

your Muslim friend must carefully weigh all the consequences of trusting Christ, so give them time and make sure you don't make trusting in Christ sound flippant (Zech 7:9-10).

Stick to the common themes where Islam and Christianity meet, like Jesus and the Bible. Use those themes to introduce your friend to the truth about them, like the claims of Christ, his death and resurrection, and the Bible being the inspired word of God (John 3:16-17).

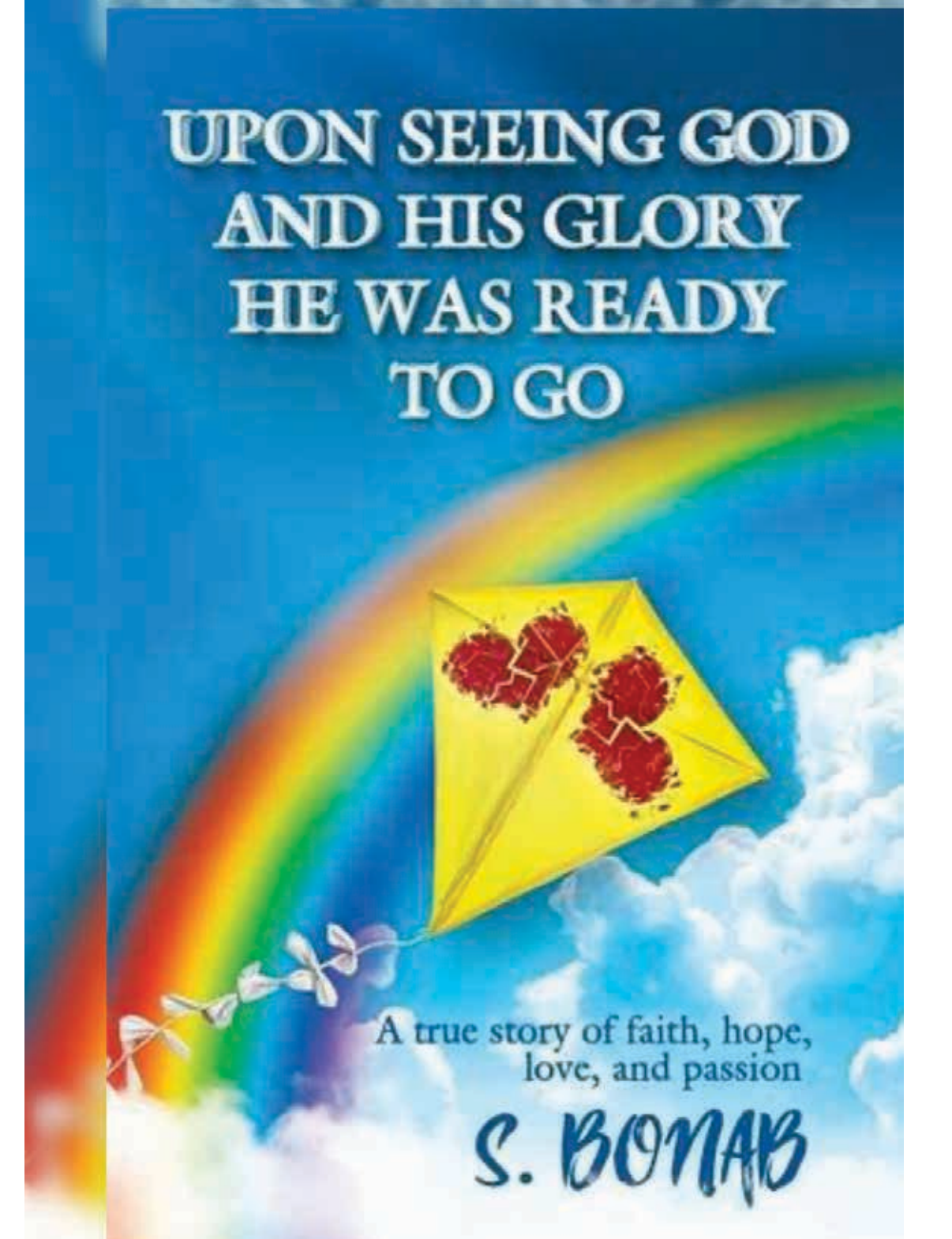
Muslims often view their God (Allah) as an angry and demanding being. Use your own testimony as a way to show how it is possible to have a personal relationship with the personal God of the universe (Yahweh) who loves and forgives unconditionally on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection (Acts 17:26-27).¹³

Here are some of my own recommendations to the church on how to bring Muslims to Jesus:

1. Christian leaders need to prepare their members through proper education about Jesus according to orthodox Christian teaching as it contrasts with Jesus as he is portrayed in Islamic teachings (John 3:16-17).
2. Church pastors and congregants must model God as the God of mercy for Islamic believers (Isa 58:6-11).
3. Pastors must avoid the temptation of comparing the Bible and the Quran and criticizing Islam (Acts 17:26-27). To quote the Quran is one thing. To criticize it is rude as well as dangerous. It must be treated respectfully.
4. Pastors must love Muslims, bringing them to Jesus through dialogue, loving outreach, and careful instruction in the redemptive work of Jesus (John 3:16-17).
5. Christians should keep the discussions focused on sin and its penalty, redemption, and peace with God through Jesus Christ. Through Jesus' act of sacrificial love on the cross at Calvary, God provided humankind a new covenant of grace (John 3:16-17). It is the manifestation of God's greatest mercy. Jesus' sacrificial blood covenant redeemed humankind, including Muslims, therefore, it mandates that all believers reach the lost for Jesus. This is the mercy shown to those from Islam who embrace Jesus as God's Son. God created all humans (including Muslims) so they should search for him and perhaps find him, since he is not far away from each of us (Acts 17:26-27).

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13 Tiffany Jothen: "How Can You Share the Gospel with Muslims?" <https://billygraham.org/articles/how-can-you-share-the-gospel-with-muslims>.



UPON SEEING GOD AND HIS GLORY HE WAS READY TO GO

A true story of faith, hope,
love, and passion

S. BONAB

Review of *Rest: A Theological Account* by Euntaek David Shin (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2024)

RODNEY PETERSEN

Euntaek David Shin begins his analysis of “Rest” by asking a straightforward question: Why are we apparently so restless? In asking this question, he does not take as a point of departure the sabbath, as is often done in similar studies. Rather, he asks us to consider two variables – *the economy of the triune God* and *human finitude*.

There are many books on sabbath as advocated and practiced today and in the days of the formation of the Torah, and on the psychological value of such in the eras of the Old and New Testament, and on the cultural uniqueness of a theological account of rest. Shin brings all this and his additional linguistic grounding in Hebrew, Greek, and his native Korean to bare. This is an exercise in constructive theology in a work that deals with the implications of his two variables in light of “place” illustrated in *nature and society* and in daily *activities, of time*, and in terms of *memory*, and *God*, the source of all these domains.

To his simple question: Why are we so restless? Shin begins his inquiry in the relationship between the divine economy and human finitude with a simple idea that, “*a restful life flows from living in sync with the triune God’s economy*.” Restfulness stems from the dynamic between God-given limitations in various dimensions of our lives and our responses to the work of the triune God. By contrast, restlessness grows as we live out of sync with God’s activity and live within our own understanding of (in)finitude. Pausing from work is insufficient for restful living. Instead, it is life in tune to God’s interaction with the created world when we are working, playing, eating, sleeping, etc.

Chapter 1 locates “Rest” theology in the relationship between the divine economy and human finitude. Human beings are ontologically dependent on God, “like branches dependent on a vine for their very life.” This perennial relationship forms the contours of life as we navigate our life as finite creatures. All of us have limits and bounds, the universal responsibility of navigating the streams of our lives. A failure to do so can produce restlessness. Shin asks, what if finitude is a gift? What if God intended for his creation to be limited in order that they might live with him and within the created world more fully? In *Rest*, Shin addresses the crisis and condition of restlessness by constructively engaging historical and contemporary philosophical and theological voices and ultimately some surprising places in Christian Scripture.

“Rest” in the triune God, is called by Dietrich Bonhoeffer the “Christ-reality” of human life seen in our place, action, time, and ultimately the triune God. This reality examines how the divine economy sets limits in our relation to these facets of life. On this account, a restful life flows from living in sync with the divine economy through faith, love, and hope. Shin’s exposition holds together manifold tensions such as how our present rest cannot be completely free from restlessness; how the personal experience of rest always incorporates some communal fulfillment; how rest is not static but dynamically involves deliberation, action, and reflection; and how we find restfulness in both created goods and the ultimate Good. Connecting theoretical reflection with concrete illustrations, *Rest* theology contributes to an understanding of who we are and how we should live, inviting us to reflect on and recalibrate our approach to everyday living.

Shin offers an account of place in chapter 2. He finds this to be, “an ordered set of God-given human relationships within our created home.” The concept of “liturgy” is drawn upon here. Liturgy is “the divine economy” which continually shapes communication and shares the fruit of our work. The biblical account of Ruth is referenced as doing this. The divine economy continually shapes the fabric of place as illustrated in Ruth and Naomi.

A theological account of rest is offered in chapter 3. Shin argues that we must incorporate the daily activities that we undertake as embodied creatures in their various places. Philosopher Blaise Pascal's concept of *distraction* addresses our foolish responses to *boredom* as we experience the misuse of things to distract ourselves rather than dealing with our wretchedness. The book of *Ecclesiastes* can help us relate earthly goods properly to God. We experience restfulness by enjoying our portion gratefully and sharing goods generously.

Chapter 4 argues that a theological account of rest must involve the healing of memories. Here Shin borrows from Augustine. He finds memory that which draws from the past and imagines the future. Shin finds value in the sabbath as God's creation of holy time. Augustine's *Confessions* epitomizes the need for forgiveness and is the occasion for praise and future hope. This is made possible through the Spirit's sanctification and the Son's mediation in human memory. The biblical Psalms and Christ's prayers exemplify the ways both individuals and communities draw upon a constructive "rest" theology.

A constructive "rest" theology is proposed in chapter 5 that offers a theological account of rest of necessity oriented toward the *beatific vision*. This incorporates God's delight in our embodied work, our restful living. The book of Hebrews describes this pilgrimage as we take it to our journey's end. Gregory of Nyssa recognizes that this end is not static. Soren Kierkegaard's call for a "purity of heart" as our resting ultimately depends on a single-minded pursuing the good.

The task before us is to recognize that we find restfulness in the fact that God first loved us. In conclusion, Shin writes, "From there with a pure heart, we begin to live in harmony with the divine economy to find further restfulness. And once again we return in praise to the source of rest, in who we find fulfillment of restfulness" (p. 184).

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Review of *Reading the Bible Latinamente: Latino/a Interpretation for the Life of the Church* by Ruth Padilla DeBorst, M. Daniel Carroll R., and Miguel G. Echevarria (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2024)

VIVIAN G. RIVERA

SUMMARY OF THE CONTENT OF THE BOOK: Three Hispanic-American Bible scholar authors intend with this book to be of value to Protestant Christian Hispanics in the United States (US) from their endeavors, such as building community, congregations, families, and overcoming struggles, using faith and cultural traditions. The authors do not focus on specific denominational groups of Latino/a Christians as these are very diverse, but instead connect the biblical truth and biblical revelation to the everyday lives of Hispanic immigrants (x, xi).

CHAPTER ONE: Dr. Ruth Padilla DeBorst¹ portrays Hispanics as “extremely diverse people” in “Who Are We and from Where Do We Read? Latino/a Identity and Location” (3). Dr. Padilla DeBorst begins with the story of a pastor’s Christian daughter who is being controlled by a gang. In desperation over her own situation, she crosses the US border. In the US, she finds comfort by reading the Bible after long hours of daily work; she has even memorized Psalm 23! (2) Following it is the contrasting example that originates from Dr. Padilla DeBorst’s life experience as a Latina. Dr. Padilla DeBorst is a well-educated individual, fluent in English, born into educational advantage, and holding a US passport! Despite her advantages, her life’s journey did not depart from the Latino community; instead, she teaches theology to seminary students from various diverse ethnic backgrounds within the Hispanic community (2, 3). Dr. Padilla DeBorst depicts the Hispanic diversity, discussing its ancestry, which goes back to the Africans, Spaniards, Portuguese, Europeans, Middle Easterners, and Asians (4). Faith is also a diverse aspect of Hispanic culture; some Hispanics come from a Roman Catholic background, while others are evangelical (4). Dr. Padilla DeBorst connects with the Hispanic reader by using known idioms, such as we are *a mezcla* (mixture). The diversity of Hispanics is so broad that they are marginalized as “second-class US citizens”; this is part of *la lucha* (the struggle), developing resilience and an amazing capacity to adapt to *la lucha* (6). Dr. Padilla DeBorst proceeds to inquire, “From where do we read the Bible?” (11). Dr. Padilla DeBorst indicates that Christian Hispanic immigrants read the Bible from their identity, from their liminal space, they are “in-betweeners” (12). Hispanics relate to this aspect through Abraham and Sarah, as well as Ruth, who were forced to migrate for survival, and to Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus, who migrated to Egypt (12). She also cites the theologian scholar Dr. Justo Gonzalez, who contends that the “Bible is part of their wisdom repository” for the low-educated grandparents (14), who “read from within the Believing Community, the Church,” in gatherings where successes and struggles are shared (15). The last aspect of this chapter is “We read from within *la lucha* (the struggle)” (15). The stereotypes that Hispanics face in the US portray them as “always others,” making Hispanics “eternal outsiders” (15). Dr. Padilla DeBorst calls the outlook from where Hispanic immigrants read the Bible a “true gift” (17).

CHAPTER TWO: Having understood the prior topics of Dr. Padilla DeBorst, “Who Are We and from Where Do We Read,” we can proceed to explore “Reading Latinamente: How Do We Read the Bible?” Dr. Padilla DeBorst takes the reader to the comfort of *Mamita’s* kitchen, her grandmother in Quito, Ecuador, where *Mamita* joyfully shares her own testimony with her

1 Dr. Ruth Padilla DeBorst was born in Colombia, reared in Argentina by an American mother and an Ecuadorian father. She holds a bachelor’s degree in education (Argentina), an M.A. in interdisciplinary studies (Wheaton College), and a Ph.D. in theology with emphasis on missiology and social ethics (Boston University). She lives with her husband, James, in Costa Rica as a member of *Casa Adobe*, an intentional Christian community with deep concern for right living in relation to the whole of creation. Her publication contributions include: *The Mission of the Church: Five Views in Conversation*; *Whole and Reconciled*, and *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspectives*.

granddaughter (20). *Mamita* had limited education; however, the Bible was found at the dining table and read *sencillamente* (simply) at every meal by *Papito* (20, 21), Dr. Padilla DeBorst's grandfather. Dr. Padilla DeBorst underscores the importance of memorizing and reciting the Bible (21). She points out in "We Read Together, in Community, *en Conjunto*" that in an individualistic culture, the term "you" is used to refer to either an individual or a group. In contrast, the Spanish language distinguishes between singular and plural forms; Latinos/as refer to a singular person as "*tu*," also "*vos*," or "*usted*." For plural, *ustedes*. *vosotros* are used (24). Dr. Padilla DeBorst posits an interesting fact: such a contrast is found between the Spanish and English Bible translations. The Bible draws a distinction when read to the Christian community. Hispanics "read in the plural" (24), and this is how they also read the Bible, as indicated by Dr. Padilla DeBorst, who affirms "we identify with a New Testament community struggling to bridge differences, find common ground, and live justly as an intercultural body," just as the Israelites attempted, crossing the desert in community (25). Chapter two's last theme is "We read *en el camino*, along the Way of Daily Life." Dr. Padilla DeBorst portrays *El Camino* as a path of low-wage jobs and limited educational opportunities due to their ethnicity and skin color (26). However, Latinos/Latinas continue to read the Bible along *El Camino*, celebrating as a community, and building resilience as they believe God speaks to them through *la lucha*, from *lo cotidiano* or their daily lives "for survival and belonging" (27).

CHAPTERS THREE AND FOUR: Dr. M. Daniel Carroll Rodas,² in "Strangers in a Strange Land: Old Testament I," leads us to see the life stories of Christian Hispanic immigrants in connection with the biblical stories of Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, and Ruth. First is the story of Abram migrating to the foreign land of Canaan. Dr. Carroll R. titles the discussion "Lines in the Sand: Struggling for our Latinidad". He depicts Abrams' and Sarai's migration journey to be similar to that of Hispanics, where Hispanics could place their migrant journey to the US, facing danger, famine, on foot, an uncertain future, and once in the land, having to move to another region, and making challenging moral decisions in difficult circumstances (34, 36). The second Bible character chosen in this chapter is Joseph, the son of Jacob. Dr. Carroll R. indicates "Joseph was what we call today a forced migrant victim of vengeance and potential violence" (38). Joseph developed the capacity to adapt to the daily life of his new country, becoming bilingual, and was hired for a job where he performed well, excelling in it. The critical and vital fact Dr. Carroll R. posits is that Joseph did not forget his roots, even at the cusp of his success. He reunited his "extended family" by forgiving them and providing for them financially, as Hispanic immigrants often do for their families left behind in their countries of origin by sending them "remittances" (39).

The third character that Dr. Carroll R. highlights is Daniel, directing the reader's attention to the identity challenges in Daniel's life as an immigrant in the region of Babylon. Daniel and his friends' identities were stolen (41); their names were changed, and they had to learn a new culture. He did not conform to worship the Babylonian idols; he continued to exercise his faith, challenging the government authorities, and neither did he change his diet, which was part of his Jewish religion and ethnicity. Dr. Carroll R. discusses how the lives of Hispanic communities are "in constant negotiation," just as Daniel's was (42).

This writer totally concurs with Dr. Carroll R., the Anglos change our names once Hispanic immigrants land in the US to facilitate their more straightforward pronunciation of our names, for their convenience, and for conformity. The story of Ruth demonstrates her great awareness

2 Dr. M. Daniel Carroll R. is half-Guatemalan and was raised bilingual and bicultural. In his youth, he spent many summers in Guatemala and later taught at El Seminario Teológico Centroamericano in Guatemala City for thirteen years. He holds a B.A. in English Literature from Rice College, a Th.M. in the Old Testament from Dallas Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. in the Old Testament from the University of Sheffield. His publications include: *Processing the Processes of Migration: Insights from the Book of Daniel* (2021), *Twenty Years of Amos Research in Currents in Biblical Research* (2019), and *Latino/Latina Biblical Interpretation, Scripture and its Interpretation: An Ecumenical, Global Introduction to the Bible* (2017).

of being a foreigner in a new land. Although her levirate marriage with Boaz granted legal status in the land of Israel, her foreign status was always a “perpetual” one (44). The last section of this chapter contends, “It is all so unfair: Exclusion and Exploitation.” The Egyptians increased the labor hardship of the Hebrews, just as Hispanics have experienced as immigrants, with the low-wage jobs and undesirable work conditions reserved for Hispanics (50). The stories of the Bible help them counteract their fears as Hispanics “define our place and highlight our contributions.” Dr. Carroll R. centers in chapter three, “La Palabra de Dios nos acompaña en este Peregrinaje” (51).

CHAPTER FOUR: “In A Latino/a Blessing: Old Testament II,” Dr. Carroll R. takes the four Bible characters discussed in chapter three and explores the purpose of the immigrants in the land they inhabit. He takes the reader back to Genesis one more time, this time to communicate the purpose of Abraham as an immigrant, studying what Genesis 12:2-3 reveals about Abraham blessing others. In continuation, Dr. Carroll R. underscores significant points of the Genesis scripture. The people of God bless others because they have been blessed by God; they will become great by blessing others. Dr. Carroll R. argues that “our greatness is based on faithfulness to God” (57). “Immigrants are to be the instruments, or channel of God’s rich blessings to all people” (57). Immigrants become unimportant to society as they become instruments of God (57). Dr. Carroll R. studies Jeremiah 29, where God reveals to his people in exile that they are to bless the land where they have planted their feet. The prophet encourages the “exiles to build homes, plant gardens, and eat their produce” (Jer 29:5), to seek the welfare of Babylon, to be agents of shalom. As Dr. Carroll R. moves to the book of Daniel, he introduces a term, “Theology arising out of exile” (69). He contends that “Daniel and his friends serve as critics of the empire, a theology that exposes the limitations, cruelties, and the just end of the human arrogance” (69). Following the book of Ruth, Dr. Carroll R. posits the significance of this book to be about “lovingkindness and perseverance” (69). Ruth encounters and accepts a new faith as she meets God in her exile in Judah. Ruth blesses her mother-in-law, Naomi, by marrying Boaz. This marriage will lead to the lineage of Jesus, who will bless Israel and Gentiles, just as Ruth did. Ruth was an immigrant who blessed her surroundings in a new land.

CHAPTER FIVE: Dr. Miguel G. Echevarria³ titled this chapter “Equal Participants in the Community of God: New Testament I.” Dr. Echevarria begins this chapter by sharing with the reader the segregation and marginalization that he and his family experienced in the foreign land of the US. Dr. Echevarria narrates that they faced rejection from the community, which explicitly stated “no Cubans, no children” (76). I empathize entirely with Dr. Echevarria, as I recall being told at a workplace in New Hampshire, “Here we speak French, go back to your island.” After so many years, the memory still feels like it squeezes my heart; my abdomen feels tense; heat runs through my neck, and I take a deep breath to storage back this memory. Dr. Echevarria also discusses the marginalization from the church, who welcome Hispanics by informing them “we do not have a Spanish Ministry” or English-speaking church with a Spanish service exclusively designed for Hispanics, thus stereotyping Hispanics as non-English speakers (76). Dr. Echevarria reminds the Christian immigrants in the US, “the New Testament supports that we are fully accepted into the community of God by the saving work of Jesus Christ” (77). Dr. Echevarria remarks that the kings of the East in Matthew 2:1-2 were outsiders bringing gifts to Jesus Christ, just as Hispanic immigrants bring their gifts of bilingual skills, hard labor, and culture to the US (79). Dr. Echevarria indicates that, in Mark 15:39, the centurion enters into the inclusion of the

3 Dr. Miguel G. Echevarria was born in the United States to Cuban immigrants. He is an Associate Professor of New Testament and Greek at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He holds a B.A. from Bellarmine University, a Th.M. from Dallas Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is married to Hollie and they have four daughters. He is the author of *The Future Inheritance of Land in the Pauline Epistles* (Pickwick 2019), *40 Questions about the Apostle Paul* (Kregel 2023), *Engaging the New Testament: A Short Introduction for Students and Ministers* (Baker 2024). He has also published short commentaries on the Gospel of John and the Johannine Epistles in the *New Testament in Color* (IVP 2024).

family of God by acknowledging the messianic promise, as Christian immigrants in the US seek acceptance into the Latino “community of faith” (79, 80). Dr. Echevarria declares that, in John 4:1-45, Jesus’ salvation extends from one nationality, the Jewish yet unaccepting, to the Samaritan woman and her community. This aspect is parallel to Christian immigrants, who are comfortable in their familiar community, where Spanish is spoken, ethnic dishes are familiar, and God welcomes them to a land where they are not welcomed (80-81). Dr. Echevarria contends in his final section of Chapter Five that the relevance of the book of Galatians is significant in the present times, as the Apostle Paul teaches the Galatians not to conform to the ethnic identity markers of the time, such as circumcision, in order to be accepted among God’s people. Instead, what is important is the faith in God that has been transmitted for generations, demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit in being imitators of God (88). Dr. Echevarria posits that some of the markers of our present twenty-first century in the dominant cultures and also in our Hispanic churches are the political sides that Latinos are being pressured to support to be accepted in their churches. Still, he reminds the Christian Hispanic immigrants that they can genuinely be “us” without adapting any identity markers; being equally accepted in the family of God by faith in Christ, just as the Apostle Paul’s message is that there is no “give-and-take” (90). Jews and Gentiles are accepted into the family of God without giving up or adapting identity markers. In the same way, Christian Hispanics do not have to give up their ethnic identity for God to accept them as one and equal.

CHAPTER SIX: In the final chapter of the book, “Diaspora Faith Communities: New Testament II,” as Dr. Echevarria refers to it, “diaspora” is a term used to describe *people being dispersed in a strange land* (99). He shares his own experience while attending Anglo churches, feeling “out of place, like I belong somewhere else” (99). Dr. Echevarria argues that the Latino diaspora is part of the dispersion from the Garden of Eden (Gen 1-3). He asserts that Jesus Christ will lead the diaspora to a new exile. Dr. Echevarria encourages the reader to be a blessing in the strange land they are in. He argues that for many Hispanics, “dispersion is not an abstract concept but rather an inevitable reality”—the reality of the many aspirational and painful circumstances that brought them to the US (102). As the Apostle Peter indicates, believers around the world experience suffering; Christian Hispanics are not alone in this suffering (1 Pet 5:9) (109). Dr. Echevarria states, “suffering being the greatest witness of Christ,” citing theologian Samuel Escobar, who posits, “it is marked by the spirit of service that characterized Jesus himself” (111). Dr. Echevarria reminds Hispanic Christians to envision themselves as witnesses to both believers and unbelievers amid the sufferings of their diaspora status. He encourages Christian Hispanics to envision the eschatological future, “seeing ourselves as the people God has destined for community on a new earth” (Psalms 60; 61; 72) (116).

The thesis of this book is that the diversity of the Hispanic immigrants is a gift to the nation of the United States of America, and, therefore, no negotiation is needed for immigrants to be validated as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

The authors of this book clearly present biblical evidence about God’s revelation to immigrants, as it is revealed to them in the Bible, from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Dr. Padilla DeBorst informs the reader that God speaks through his Word to the Christian Hispanic immigrants in the US within their diversity. Dr. Carroll R. stresses that God’s scriptural revelation speaks to their foreign status and is a blessing to others in the strange land where they have arrived. Dr. Echevarria takes the reader to the community aspect of Christian Hispanic immigrants in the US, tracing their roots to the diaspora dispersed from the Garden of Eden, and who will be received at the new heaven and earth.

The book begins by describing the identity of the Hispanic community, in other words, “who we are.” Dr. Padilla DeBorst notes that this identity of the Hispanic community is characterized by its diversity. The diversity factor needs to be understood from the very beginning of the book, as the topic of diversity will permeate the rest of it. The diversity in identity takes Latinos/as to places of struggle. From these places, the Hispanic Christian community reads the Bible. Dr. Carroll R.

reminds immigrant Hispanic Christians that the Word of God is their company throughout their journey. The Scripture passages presented serve as evidence of immigrants who have followed and heard the voice of God from their place of struggle. The book ends with Dr. Echevarria tracing our dispersed status as immigrants back to Genesis, creating awareness that we are part of the diaspora, or the dispersed ones, from the Garden of Eden. The diaspora in its earthly struggle is composed of citizens of the new heaven and earth promised by God.

The authors intended this book to speak to Hispanic US immigrants, bringing hope, respect, significance, and validation to their status as immigrants, knowing that God has validated such status in the Bible in being a revelation to immigrants from the time of the Garden of Eden to the promised new Jerusalem of multiethnic citizens (Phil 3:20-21; Rev 7:9).

The authors' sources of information for this book are based on life experiences lived, witnessed, or known as Hispanic immigrants in the US, as well as citations from Bible scholars such as Dr. Justo L. Gonzalez and Dr. Samuel Escobar, and a poem by a M.Div. student. From the Bible, the experiences highlighted in this book from the Old Testament include the immigration stories of Abraham, Jeremiah, Ruth, Daniel, and Joseph's journey. Additionally, there are numerous references to the Old and New Testament Scriptures from the books of Genesis, Ruth, Jeremiah, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Galatians, and Ephesians, among several other Bible books.

A strength of the book is the authors' emphasis on the diversity of Hispanic immigrants, as evident in their food, music, gatherings, sense of community, idioms, struggles, resilience, and ability to adapt, as well as their enduring conviction that "no one-size-fits-all" (46). The diversity is depicted accurately for the Hispanic US immigrant reader, relating to and connecting with the experiences of Bible characters and the daily life of happiness and struggles of Hispanic immigrants. The authors do an outstanding job of demonstrating to the reader what God has been revealing in the lives of immigrants from the Bible to the present day, supported by numerous Bible passages. I appreciate that no political views were introduced in this book, as these are often controversial and in constant change.

Regarding the book's weaknesses, I wish the authors had included a glossary of the idioms used in the book and their meanings, for the benefit of both diverse readers, Hispanics, and non-Hispanics. I thank Dr. Padilla DeBorst for giving priority to the young girl's tragic story in the first chapter; she deserved such recognition on behalf of all the children crossing the border. In addition, I appreciate Dr. Carroll R. affirming that Christian Hispanic immigrants can bring change to US society by being the carriers of God's shalom (66). Dr. Echevarria was of comfort to me as a reader, as he brought me home with his idioms and experiences, to a level of *confianza de vecino, en casa* (neighbor's trust, at home), and honoring the Christian Hispanic immigrants in the US, naming them as part of the "Holy Diaspora" (99). I highly recommend this book to Christian Hispanic immigrants in the US and to Anglo churches that seek to understand their Hispanic immigrant congregants better, thereby developing strong, united churches. As an immigrant myself, although I was born in Puerto Rico, being a United States-born citizen, I empathize with all the experiences narrated in this book, nodding my head in affirmation every time I turn a page, agreeing with each author's perspective as I was reading. Furthermore, this book should be included in the textbooks of any intercultural theological seminary course.

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Review of *The Man Born to Be King* by Dorothy L. Sayers, edited by Kathryn Wehr (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2023)

WILLIAM DAVID SPENCER

This book is a gift from InterVarsity Press to all readers who appreciate the work of Dorothy Sayers. With a mind alive to an array of topics, she brought her expertise in classics, Scripture, social commentary, fiction, theater, to compose this delightful set of twelve radio plays, presented over the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) from December 1941 to October 1942, commensurate with the Broadcast Talks of C. S. Lewis, which ran from August 6, 1941 on into 1944. In the spirit of the Barmen Declaration (1934), sculpted by Swiss theologian Karl Barth and the German pastors and scholars of the Confessing Church, her plays, like Lewis's talks, honor Jesus as the only Lord for today, thereby challenging Hitler's grasp at supremacy by claiming to rule the Christian Church. As Hitler was consolidating power, spreading Nazi aggression across Europe, Dorothy Sayers's plays resonated with the Christian assurance that Jesus Christ was indeed alive and relevant and the only true Ruler divinely fit to guide and oversee the Church in his name and the nations.

Along with the plays themselves, reprinted in this commodious volume (456 pp.) from the original edition by Victor Gollancz Ltd in 1943, readers are now equipped with an enlightening introduction by editor Dr. Kathryn Wehr. She details, among other interesting aspects, the controversy between Dorothy Sayers with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) staff and its conservative listeners, shocked at her insistence on using the common parlance of their day, rather than biblical (read: King James Version) language as the speech of Jesus and the Bible's other participants.

To all readers who had no idea that these children's plays precipitated a furor, raging around the production, initiated and exploited by a small number of sensation-oriented newspapers, Dr. Wehr treats readers to a front-row seat, as the struggle shuts down the entire series, while the controversy flourishes. Reports of the furor even invade the British House of Commons, raising a question whether playwright Sayer's innocent use of everyday modern language violates a law against blasphemy and should be taken to court.

A strong woman who was not easily pushed around, Dorothy Sayers defends her motives, while continuing to prepare the radio series, transcript after transcript, while the hostile work together to shut it all down permanently. Plowing on with a "trinity" of intentions, melding creative ideas, with energy, and power, she remains adamant in her response to her critics that her choice of language is intentionally designed to reach her contemporary public.

During this wild ride, Dr. Wehr obviously wants to secure readers with sufficient seatbelts so that none of us will be flung out and lost through all this whirlwind of friendly and hostile data, thundering under the wheels of Dorothy Sayers's firm resolve to finish the project. Racing along the winding road of controversy with a mountain of explanation on one side, a sheer drop into oblivion for all the playwright's work on the other, Dr. Wehr has gone to great effort, supplying us with excellent equipment, contributing illuminating introductions to each play, highlighting themes, and characterization, and the way the playwright built a play's structure. She includes helpful well-researched marginal notes identifying secondary sources, quoting Dorothy Sayers's comments, defining unusual terms, and supplying footnotes with Scripture references, for our own largely biblically ignorant day, to take us through every turn in the unfolding map of this set of plays. In short, she has made this about the most reader-friendly text one can find – and that over a painstaking breadth from pages 61-447. The book ends with a General Index and a Scripture Index and is done under the auspices of the Marion E. Wade Center of Wheaton College in Illinois. The

Center is a treasure trove of the works of George MacDonald, G. K. Chesterton, and the Inklings: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, Owen Barfield, and, of course, Dorothy Sayers.

As a “Dedicatory” to introduce the original volume Playwright Sayers also provided “The Makers,” a poem on creativity developing a theme from a successful play she had done five years earlier, 1937’s *The Zeal of Thy House*, reminding listeners they had enjoyed her previous work. The book also includes production notes by Val Gielgud, the producer of both her earlier and present work who, D. L. Sayers insisted, should guide this one as well. And, of course, she does her own author’s introduction, a blatant defense of her present work *The Man Born to Be King* included as an introduction to that set of plays under fire. As playwright. Dorothy Sayers offers listeners a most eloquent and compelling defense, she is very clear that the Bible’s account of Jesus “is a thing that actually happened,” so it “should be handled not liturgically or symbolically, but realistically and historically” (21). While today’s readers might be baffled what this brouhaha was all about, we should recall that her day preceded J. B. Phillips’s *Letters to Young Churches* (1947), Clarence Jordan’s *Cotton Patch Gospels* (1968-73), Kenneth Taylor’s *The Living Bible* (1971), the Jesus Movement and the *Good News* translation (its NT in 1966 with the OT in 1976), replete with its designer blue denim covers, et al. One might say she was a pioneer, preparing the small churches for these contemporary presentations of God’s enduring word. She must have also shocked her conservative opponents by pointing out that then rejection of any contemporary “representations” of Jesus as “intrinsically wicked” encourages a “Docetic and totally heretical Christology which denies the full humanity of our Lord” (22). While the bulk of listeners may not have understood what on earth she meant, they could no doubt sense that that wasn’t good! For the more theologically schooled who had not joined the positive enthusiasm of many church leaders for what she was doing, this argument may have sidelined them or encouraged them to bail out of the protest and rethink the implications. Having opened up with the ammunition of her theological prowess to help clear the field sufficiently, her supporters were able to continue the radio series. Her apology is erudite, insightful, and it hits hard, especially when reminding her critics that her target was not the pious churchgoer, but “children who do not know the meaning of Christmas, men and women to whom the name of Christ is only a swear word” (23). Perhaps, to show the seriousness of Dorothy Sayers’s intentions, but probably simply following the nature of her character, she now turns to Greek tragedy for an ancient example, followed by other diverse references to Edgar Allan Poe (25), the Nicene Creed (26), Shakespeare (30), among others. Progressing her argument through the theological and practical, to the historical (29), linguistic (29-32), genre-sensitive (32-35), textual (35-36), culminating in how each aspect contributes to completing her task as playwright, she nails her argument down.

She also displays her independence of thought in such graphic descriptions as this one of the execution of Christ: “Of all examples of the classical tragic irony in fact or fiction, this is the greatest – the classic of classics. Beside it, the doom of Oedipus is trifling...that a number of quite commonplace human beings, in an obscure province of the Roman Empire, killed and murdered God Almighty—quite casually, almost as a matter of religious and political routine, and certainly with no notion that they were doing anything out of the way” (26). And she displays great discernment in treating “all four Evangelists as equally ‘witnesses of truth,’” rather than relying on the “hypothetical Q” (43).

Also, in full force, is her sardonic sense of humor to frame her response to all the verbal abuse she had been receiving in the expression of gratitude she extends to the hyper-conservative religious critics who should have supported her objectives and her work since the beginning. She acknowledges: “The plays might have slipped by with comparatively little notice, being given at an hour inconvenient for grown-up listening,” but “these doughty opponents secured for us a large increase in our adult audience and thus enabled the political and theological issues in the most important part of the story to be treated with more breadth and pungency than might otherwise

have seemed justifiable.” Thus, in her view, her severest critics “so obligingly did all our publicity for us at, I fear, considerable expense to themselves.” This untoward result, she sees, as part of the “universal comedy,” concluding, “Let us record the plain fact: the opposition did us good service; let our gratitude for that go where all gratitude is due” (48). These are quintessential D.L. Sayers’s remarks.

Also, not to be skipped, is the excellent original foreword by the BBC’s Director of Religious Broadcasting. Dr. James W. Welch, who originally commissioned the work personally from Dorothy Sayers. A devout Christian, he was appalled at the realization that a segment of the population “had discovered it was possible and easy to live without any vital belief in God... everywhere there was great ignorance of the Christian Faith: of, for example, a group of men entering the army only 23 per cent knew the meaning of Easter” (14-15). Wisely, he invests his defense in letters from listeners as these: “I am a very ordinary and humble person – a factory forewoman by trade, and it’s because of that, that I know many working folk will listen and learn from these plays who would never desire to listen to a set church service on the wireless;” “Your play *The Man Born to be King* is quite changing the atmosphere in our house, and where there has been resentment and criticism, we can feel it all dying away in the presence of Christ” (16). He also cites listener outrage as well: “It is amazing to me that people who conceive themselves to be defending the Christian use of Sunday should spend tons of money in trying to prevent an effort like this, which seems to me more likely to bring home to the ordinary British public who and what Our Lord Jesus Christ is than anything that has been done in our time” (17). The stones certainly cried out and crushed the opposition.

And now, what about all that language put into the mouths of Jesus and the disciples and those they encountered that had so many of her contemporaries in an outrage? Here’s a brief sample from the disciples’ astonishment at Jesus walking to them on the water, then saving Peter who steps in and does fine until he falters and starts to sink:

“SIMON: Help, help! I am drowning. Help, Lord!

JESUS (quite close): Hold on. I am here. I’ve got you. Why did you lose faith all of a sudden?

SIMON: I was afraid – the wind and the waves – I looked back –

JESUS: You were all right till you stopped to think about yourself. Into the boat with you!

ANDREW: Pull him in, boys!...Look out there!

(Wind and waves)

JESUS: Well, children? Is there room in the boat for me?

DISCIPLES: Yes, Master. Yes, of course.

JESUS: You’re not afraid of me, are you?

JOHN: Master, when you are here we are afraid of nothing... Shift over, Matthew...Dear Master--

JESUS: Peace be unto you.

(The wind drops instantly)

SIMON: The storm is over.

JESUS: Row on now, for we are nearly at the land.

ANDREW: Give way boys!” (200-201).

I, for one, am thankful that the BBC, Victor Gollancz, Ltd, and now InterVarsity Press with the Marion E. Wade Center all decided to let Jesus into the boat and rowed on with the project, so

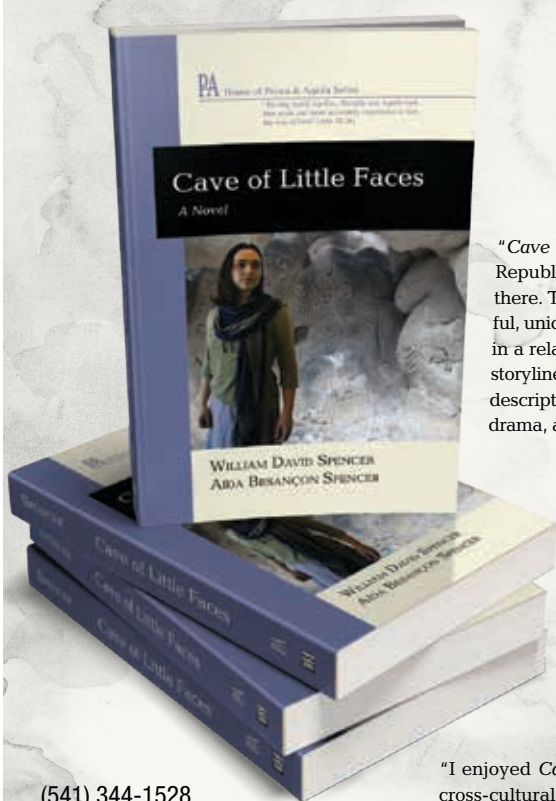
we could have this great catch for all of us today, And, in its spirit, in our own fragmented day, we should all let Jesus into the boat and row on together.

William David Spencer is Distinguished Adjunct Professor of Theology and the Arts at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's Boston Campus for Urban Ministerial Education (CUME). He earned his Th.D. in theology and ancient literature at Boston University School of Theology and has taught theology for Gordon-Conwell since 1983, from 1992 on at CUME. He has also served as Founding Pastor of Encouragement at Pilgrim Church of Beverly, MA. He edited *Priscilla Papers*, coedited *Africanus Journal*, and book series *House of Prisca and Aquila* (Wipf and Stock). He has authored circa three hundred and forty articles, chapters, editorials, poems, stories, and features, including authoring or editing nineteen books, including *Christian Egalitarian Leadership*, *The Prayer Life of Jesus*, *Dread Jesus*, *Three in One: Analogies of the Trinity* and his latest in conjunction with the Rev. Jeanne DeFazio, *The Digital Evangelist: Expanding Your Ministry by Writing for Publication*, as well as two novels, *Cave of Little Faces* and the award-winning *Name in the Papers*; as well as a related CD of his original music: *Songs from the Cave, Ballads from the Papers*. Two of his books, *Mysterium* and *Mystery* and *Chanting Down Babylon* have been declared by critics the definitive works in their fields and he has won twenty editing and writing awards. He and Aída's blog is *Applying Biblical Truths Today* at <https://aandwspencer.blogspot.com>. In it, they have done many first-person narratives by biblical characters in contemporary language.

Cave of Little Faces

A Novel

WILLIAM DAVID SPENCER
AÍDA BESANÇON SPENCER



"*Cave of Little Faces* whisks the reader into adventure in the Dominican Republic. The Spencers truly are masters of storytelling. It feels like you are there. This story could easily be made into a movie. The characters are delightful, unique, and so real. The dynamics of Jo's family come across in full color and in a relatable manner, and even the scammers are memorable characters. The storyline is captivating, to say the least. I could not put this book down. The vivid descriptions carried me away to another world—one filled with beauty, intrigue, drama, and a few good laughs as well. Bravo!"

—JENNIFER CREAMER
School of Biblical Studies, Youth With a Mission

"From their intriguing title, through a roster of memorable characters, to a string of concluding surprises that crackle like fireworks, the Spencers take us on a spiritual roller coaster ride graced with suspense, humor, and dilemmas of high moral complexity. As their heroine, Josefina, finds her way through the forests and mountains of Hispaniola, we realize that hers is a metaphor for the journey we all share—the pilgrimage of life."

—ROBERT BOENIG
author of the award-winning *C. S. Lewis and the Middle Ages*

"I enjoyed *Cave of Little Faces*! The storyline and the conflicts are great and the cross-cultural setting is one of the book's big strengths. . . . I loved the theology and history the authors brought into the book, managing to make arguments about Christianity's place in history come off as natural and not advertisements for the faith—a rare feat indeed! I also love the way they did the character descriptions. Thank you so much for sharing this wonderful gift with me."

—JASMINE MYERS
founder and director of the award-winning Still Small Theatre Troupe

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